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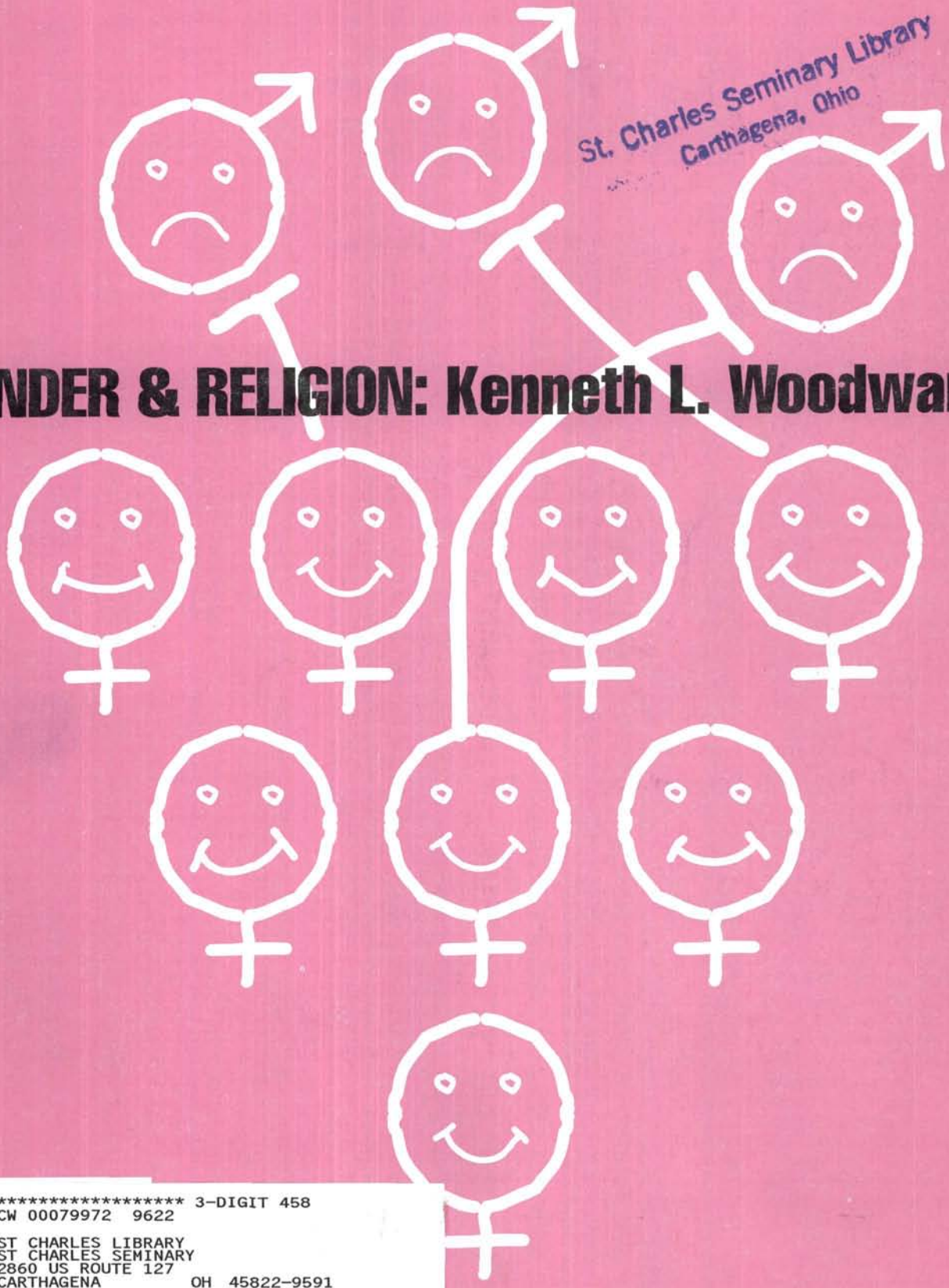

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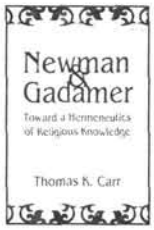

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COMMONWEAL

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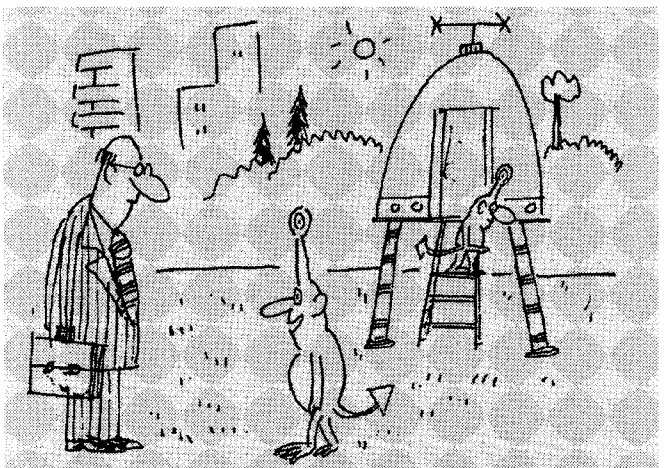

"We're just here to buy the book Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus."

GENDER & RELIGION
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To the Editors

Required reading

We enjoyed Heather King's "Serving the Smelly Poor" [October 11] so much that we are not only subscribing to your magazine but thrusting that issue into the hands of all who walk through our door, telling them there is an article here that is a *must*.

MICHELE AND FRANK SCHLOEGEL
Kansas City, Mo.

Curran oversimplifies

In his article "Two Traditions" [October 11], Charles E. Curran oversimplifies differences between church documents, arguing that the church's sexual teachings develop within a "classicist" tradition, while its social teachings are historically sensitive. As part of his evidence, Curran says that John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium vitae* assumes a "church against the world" position, contrasting the "culture of life" with the "culture of death"—a dichotomy inconsistent with the incarnational view of the world and grace assumed in recent social teachings such as the pope's recent United Nations address.

While it is true that *Evangelium vitae* insists on the universal validity of moral norms, to describe the document as exemplifying a "we versus them" approach is more reminiscent of Associated Press newsbites than of the reflections of a theologian of Curran's caliber. In fact, John Paul II is extraordinarily positive in his tone, positive about advances in modern science, praising those elements in society that have taken a stand for life, praying for and believing in the resurrection of the world, even while forcefully condemning a moral relativism that leads to the creeping acceptance of euthanasia, capital punishment, and abortion within our society. I invite people simply to skim the document to see if it squares with Curran's characterization of the church as being "in mortal opposition with all in society who disagree with its position and who foster the culture of death." The pope's own assessment of the state of things is that we live in times of "lights and shadows" (28). I find it interesting that he does not characterize these as times of "darkness."

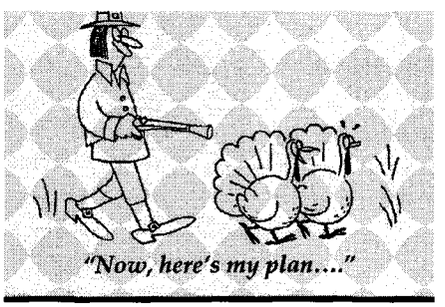
In this sense, then, I see little difference between the pope's view of the world in *Evangelium vitae* and that expressed in the cornerstone document of the church's recent social teaching, *Gaudium et spes*, which hails the advances of modern science and technology and the aspirations of developing peoples, but also warns ominously against systemic atheism, abortion, euthanasia, slavery, and other violations of human dignity. To say there exists a "culture of death" is also to read the signs of the times.

FAUSTIN N. WEBER
Montgomery, Ala.

The author replies:

The very paragraph and sentence of *Evangelium vitae* (28) cited by Faustin N. Weber well illustrate my thesis that the document contrasts the "culture of life" and the "culture of death," and involves a "we versus them" approach. The text reads: "This situation, with its lights and shadows, ought to make us all fully aware that we are facing an enormous and dramatic clash beteen good and evil, death and life, the 'culture of death' and the 'culture of life.' We find ourselves not only 'faced with' but necessarily 'in the midst of' this conflict. We are all involved and we all share in it, with the inescapable responsibility of choosing to be unconditionally pro-life."

CHARLES E. CURRAN



Reading Genesis

In his second comment on the PBS series "Genesis," Frank McConnell objected to the mix of expert and nonexpert participants [October 25]. Perhaps Bill Moyers or the producers were trying to inject new perspectives by mixing in some nonexperts, since a new paradigm rarely, if ever, emerges from experts indoctrinated in the traditional theories.

As for reconciling Genesis's two accounts of creation, each describes creation for a different teaching purpose. The first, from the Priestly text, affirms there are no other gods but the one God of creation. Its purpose is to teach monotheism. The second account, from the Yawhistic text, tells of the creation of human nature. Its purpose is to teach of the God who loves and guides us, who intercedes in human affairs: to teach of a personal but transcendent God. They tie together because belief in the one and only God of the first account is necessary so that humans will believe in the value of the second account and pay attention to its lessons.

MARILYN KRAMER
Wausau, Wis.

Wrong case

"*Requiem aeternam dona ei, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat ei.*" That's how the last sentence of the "*Subvenite*" quoted in David Loxterkamp's touching reminiscence of his mother [October 25] should have read. *Ei* is a dative singular that can appropriately be translated "unto her" and "upon her" in the first and second clauses, respectively. In the article, however, the word *ea* (probably the ablative case) is used in both places, incorrectly. The corrrect form of the sentence when it is used to pray for one person, using *ei* in both clauses, can be found in the *Missale Romanum*.

THOMAS O. MITCHELL
Wilmington, N.C.

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Commonweal, [ISSN 0010-3330] A Review of Public Affairs, Religion, Literature, and the Arts, is published biweekly except Christmas/New Year's; and monthly July and August, by Commonweal Foundation, 15 Dutch St., New York, NY, 10038. Telephone: (212) 732-0800. Display advertising correspondence should be sent to Ruth E. Taylor, 11 Graffam Rd., So. Portland, ME 04106 (207) 799-4387, classified advertising correspondence to 15 Dutch St. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Commonweal, 15 Dutch St. New York, NY 10038.

Commonweal is indexed in Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, Catholic Periodical Index, Index of American Periodical Verse, Book Review Digest, and Book Review Index. Microfilm from Vol. 1, 1924, to current issues available through University Microfilm, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106 and on Microfiche from Bell & Howell, Wooster, OH 44691. *Commonweal* articles also are available at many libraries and research facilities on CD-ROM and in electronic data bases. Serials Data program No.: ISSN 0010-3330. Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y., and at additional offices. Copyright © 1996 Commonweal Foundation. Single Copy, $2.25. Yearly subscriptions, U.S., $44; Canada, $47; foreign, $50. Special two-year rate: U.S. $75; Canada, $81; foreign, $87. Annual rates for air-mail delivery outside U.S.: Western Hemisphere, $84; Europe, $89; other parts of the world, $99. All Canadian and foreign subscriptions must be paid in U.S. dollars by International Money Order or by check on a U.S. bank.

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More of the same?

In the most expensive ($800 million) election in American history and possibly the most corrupt (depending on how you read federal law or what you think big money does to the democratic process), both President Bill Clinton and the Republican Congress have been returned to office. Each side has declared itself vindicated. Neither, however, seems eager to claim a mandate. Both seem chastened, if not by the voters' refusal to choose between the two, then by the daunting tasks of governance ahead.

The most popular school of thought interprets the election's ratification of the status quo as symptomatic of the nation's intractable divisions. Americans voted for divided government to forestall making difficult decisions about the impending insolvency of Medicare and other federal entitlement programs, and to postpone the debate over affirmative action, income inequality, and health care. For the short term, Clinton will continue to check the excesses of House Speaker Newt Gingrich and his "revolutionary" cohorts while the penny-pinching Republican Senate and House will readily stifle any of the Democrats' more expansive appetites for taxes and federal activism. In this scenario, the message of the election is that Americans have spurned both parties by deciding not to decide.

But there is another plausible interpretation of what was universally regarded as the dullest political campaign in memory. E.J. Dionne of the *Washington Post* (and occasionally of *Commonweal)* argues that this very dullness indicated how the divisive issues that dominated presidential politics for nearly three decades have lost their saliency. Clinton's ability to deflect the old, so-called "wedge" issues of crime, patriotism, and coded racial appeals suggests the national agenda is shifting.

Clinton deftly co-opted traditional Republican issues by advocating a balanced budget, the death penalty, welfare reform, and by articulating middle-class cultural concerns. But he also went beyond such tired polemics by focusing the country's attention, at least rhetorically, on the future and on such pressing worries as balancing work and family and securing medical care for the elderly. Defending a larger federal role in education, environmental protection, and crime fighting was an important part of Clinton's re-election bid. The Republican mantra stressing the infallibility of markets and lower taxes, and the uselessness of government, simply did not describe the experience or address the anxieties and hopes of most Americans.

A new national consensus or "vital center"—one with lowered expectations but far from repudiating government—would be a welcome development. Initially, both Clinton and Republican congressional leaders have spoken of a period of bipartisan cooperation. Such a development does not seem likely. Indeed, the new Congress is more ideologically conservative than the notorious 104th. Still, whether taken up in a bipartisan or an adversarial fashion, both campaign-finance reform and the containment of entitlement spending will have to come at the top of any national agenda. Clinton must also honor his pledge to fix the welfare reform bill he himself signed into law earlier this year. What progress can be made

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in these and other areas—gun control, immigration, the crisis in the justice system, abortion, and much more—will greatly depend on the actions of the special prosecutor investigating Whitewater and other alleged administration wrongdoing. If the president, his wife, or their associates are indicted, any hopeful shift toward a more constructive national consensus will be delayed, if not derailed. It is to be hoped that the continuing investigations of the Clintons will not plunge the nation into a constitutional crisis and another period of bitter political recrimination.

OF SEVERAL MINDS

ABIGAIL McCARTHY

IT'S PAYBACK TIME

What the sisters did

America "is the most democratic country in the world, and it is at the same time... the country in which the Roman Catholic religion makes most progress." So wrote Alexis de Tocqueville in 1835. He was indeed prescient. In the fourth quarter of the twentieth century the Catholic church is still thriving and growing in numbers and its people are ranked among the best-educated and prosperous of all American groups.

We must acknowledge that the growth of the church in America and the success of its people are largely owed to the vision, energy, devotion, and self-sacrifice of America's priests and religious who gave the church its institutions. Think of the role they played in our history: Priests and male religious came first to this continent as missionaries. As the missionary age passed and European settlers flocked to North America as settlers, the religious stayed to be pastors and educators. They established parishes and founded the first Catholic college for men—Georgetown. They nurtured small academies in the wilderness that grew into internationally known universities like Saint John's and Notre Dame. Eventually their secondary schools and colleges dotted the country from coast to coast and from the Mexican border to Canada.

At the same time, women religious were answering the call of our new country. In the first years of the republic the aristocratic convert Mother Elizabeth Seton founded the first free schools for small children. Soon thereafter, as I wrote for the American Council on Education in 1989, the ancestors of today's women religious poured out of the towns and villages of France, Italy, and Germany and came to America, intent on educating girls and women, intent on the mission of the church. What they accomplished was prodigious. A recent article in a major news magazine summed up their accomplishment: they built the most far-flung and accessible

system of higher education for women the world has ever known. They took the daughters of frontiersmen and immigrants and lifted them from one level to another and, in so doing, transformed families and communities. Convent education in either the French or German model was important in the "civilizing" of frontier after frontier and was sought by leading settlers for their daughters whether they were Catholic or not. Convent education helped shape the country, and from many of these convents sprang the strong colleges later founded by women religious.

And we American Catholics took this all for granted! The religious had always been there for us. We assumed they always would be. It was therefore with real shock that in 1986 we read in the *Wall Street Journal* that many elderly religious were living below the poverty line and were, in effect, welfare clients. How could this be? Few of us had recognized that drastic change had affected the basic assumption underlying the financial structure of religious orders: that the work of the younger members would undergird the needs of the aging members. This was no longer so.

The exodus from religious life in the years after Vatican II emptied many communities of members at the height of their productive lives. Vocations declined and there were few new members to replace those who had gone. Like Americans in general, religious were living longer.

The impoverishment of the religious was not news to the religious themselves. They had struggled with the growing problem since the 1960s. In the 1970s, when they were allowed into the Social Security system, many members of congregations began to apply for benefits. But, for the most part, the Social Security payments they qualified for were pitiably small. They had subsisted on small stipends from the parishes

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in which they staffed parochial schools, or on stipends from the institutions their orders sponsored—hospitals, private schools, and colleges. The difference between the stipends they lived on and the professional salaries to which they were entitled was donated to the institutions and accepted by financial bodies as a "living endowment." They had, quite literally, donated their lives for the health and education of the Catholic people. They did not ask for help, and they were reduced to accepting Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid like other poor citizens.

By the 1980s, church authorities began to realize that the poverty of elderly religious was not a problem in this or that diocese but was a national problem. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, the Council of the Major Superiors of Women, and the Conference of the Major Superiors of Men joined to survey the problem and find possible solutions. In 1983 a preliminary study was completed at Fordham University. In 1986 the National Religious Retirement Office was founded to help religious congregations cope with the problem, and surveys by Arthur Andersen were commissioned.

It was discovered that the median age for women religious was sixty-eight and for men sixty-one. As suspected, religious were found to live longer than the general population. And the retirement liability for past service went into the billions of dollars!

Two things resulted from the first survey. Church officials found through polling that Catholics would be glad to respond to a national collection for retired religious, and they established a national collection for the retirement fund in 1988. At the same time religious communities made every effort to cut costs and raise additional money. They sold property, altered existing structures for more economical use, and developed intercommunity efforts for cost-efficient care of elderly members. Small and isolated communities merged with larger ones of the same tradition.

In the eight years that the collection for retired religious has been taken, it has become the most popular of the ongoing collections of the United States bishops. In 1995, when a great blizzard struck the eastern United States on the weekend of the collection and prevented many people from going to church, the collection still exceeded all expectations.

This is heartening news. It means that the Catholic people have a very clear sense of how unique and far-reaching the work of religious has been in American society and how it has affected them. They are more than willing to help the precious remnant who even now in retirement do what they can to help each other, to mentor and tutor, to visit the isolated old and sick, and to free the all-too-few young of their communities for new ministries—especially ministries to the poor. May this year's collection be larger than ever!

Postscript: I went to Minnesota to be a reader at the F. Scott Fitzgerald Centennial Celebration [*see Commonweal*, October 11] and to give a speech. After participating in one reading session, I mistook an open basement door in an unfamiliar house for a hallway and pitched headfirst down the whole flight of stairs—ending up with a gash on my forehead (fifty stitches!), two hairline fractures, black eyes, and a mass of bruises. But I was lucky not to be killed, and I had wonderful care in the emergency room and the hospital where I was kept for observation. (If you're going to fall down, do it in Minnesota!) Everything is healing. Friends and family have rallied to keep me comfortable and fed—and it's only four more weeks until the walking cast comes off! □

OF SEVERAL MINDS

SIDNEY CALLAHAN

THE CAPITAL THAT COUNTS

The coin that creates trust

How much "social capital" do you possess? Your "material capital" in money and property can be easily ascertained by your friendly mortgage officer, and your "human capital" in genetic endowment, education, and learned skills is easily estimated as well. But what, for goodness sake, makes up your "social capital"? And why is it so important?

I've been wrestling with the intriguing concept of "social capital" in James Coleman's classic *Foundations of Social Theory*. He was the famous sociologist, beloved of Catholic educators, who found the parochial schools to be superior to other systems because they possessed more social capital than their competitors. But individuals also vary in the amounts of social capital they can draw upon. You can be healthy, wealthy, and technologically skilled yet still be socially impoverished.

Social capital, unlike other kinds of more tangible capital, consists of *relationships* among persons, groups, and communities that engender trust and/or mutual obligations. These relationships, expectancies, and trusting obligations between persons mean that persons can draw upon social capital in order to act more effectively. Such wealth is not like private property because relationships and the norms they engender can never be completely controlled or disposed of by any single actor.

Obviously, there are as many different forms of social capital as there are different relationships among people and groups. In Coleman's theory, private effectiveness is facilitated by social capital, but it also exists as a collective public good. If everyone looks out for everyone else in a neighborhood and all abide by a norm against aggression, then children can walk to school safely and old people can go out at night.

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Social capital produces public order as well as general insurance for those who have it. This is especially important when you are old, young, dependent, ill, or in trouble. Your relationships with others will produce the aid they are obligated to give and you can normally expect. Families and kin are the champion providers of these resources distributed according to need rather than according to an individual's productive labor.

Children and others who possess social capital have what Coleman calls the "sustained attention" of others directed specifically at them as whole persons rather than productive but exchangeable cogs in a corporation. Happily, this caring attention and investment appear to increase responsibility for the other person. If you possess social capital, Coleman notes, someone would be there to claim your body if you suddenly ended up in the local morgue as an accident victim.

While it is hard to measure social capital directly, it can be inferred from its powerful effects. Certain conditions favor the growth of social capital. Sustained attention, trust, and personal bonds tend to increase if a child has two parents in the home, competes with fewer siblings, moves infrequently, rarely changes schools, is a member of a church community, and attends a religious school. He or she is less likely to drop out and more likely to achieve success.

I think it is also clear from other psycho-social research that good health is associated with the possession of social capital. Relationships with a supportive network of family and friends appear to buffer stress and to keep the immune system activated. Moreover, you pick up a lot of useful information from persons with whom you are interacting.

Voluntary associations beyond the family directly build up social capital—even if, most famously, the group is a bowling team. All sorts of voluntary associations, the so-called "mediating institutions" that are neither government nor for-profit corporations, can indirectly produce relationships of trust and mutual obligation. Other voluntary associations are formed to serve the public good directly. The local PTA or neighborhood improvement group may generally be undersupported, but the investment of energy by the few benefits the inactive many—all those others known as free riders.

Stability in an environment furthers social capital, as does the continuity of the residents in a community. An individual family that moves away from a neighborhood decreases the social capital of those left behind by breaking off a host of interrelationships and bonds. The more closure or interdependent relationships that exist in a community, the more social capital. The more closure, the easier it becomes to enforce norms, especially intergenerational norms. Parents who do not have interdependent ties with other parents in their community have more difficulty controlling their children.

In Coleman's analysis, parents who have fewer mutually dependent relationships with other local parents possess less social capital than their children, who not only possess their intrafamily ties but also have strong bonds with their peers. It's not a fair fight. In my town last year the local parents could not even agree to forbid unchaperoned parties in their homes, much less set a collective curfew for their teen-agers. This reminded me of painful struggles with our own adolescents in the '70s when some of the affluent parents in our neighborhood welcomed their adolescent children's sexual partners and allowed them to sleep together overnight. Other swinging parents smoked pot at home with their kids and their friends.

Affluence appears to deplete social capital because you don't need to be dependent on others. Reigning individualistic ideologies of liberation, self-sufficiency, and choice can add to the destruction. Even the social capital inherent in family obligations and bonds can end up squandered. By contrast, religious ideologies that impose demands for individual action directed to the good of others builds up social capital. Coleman felt that in Catholic schools a child's problems were less likely to be ignored because of the belief that each person is intrinsically valuable in the sight of God.

If we want to be dismissive, we can say that this focus on "social capital" simply provides a way for social scientists to recognize (at last) the nonmaterial, "spiritual" realities of life; that this analytic evaluation of human relationships and trust as a form of wealth counters materialistic and technocratic approaches to society. But it also helps us understand how and why things fall apart. Better yet, it gives us some direction for renewing and creating new forms of social capital.

If you believe that persons or groups can act purposefully to organize and reorganize themselves, then it *is* possible to begin to build up social capital. First, we can invest energy and resources in those relationships and associations (however fragile) that presently support people and work for the public good. Let's hear it for the family (all variants), the parish, the neighborhood, and voluntary associations. Then we can work to create new forms of interdependent relationships that build up trustworthiness, mutual support, and sustained attention to persons.

Cannot the phenomenal growth of the small-group movement in America be one attempt to develop substitutes for eroded forms of primordial social capital? Shared housing for the old, alumnae and big-brother mentoring, parish nurses, nursing-home ombudsmen, and parent-run daycare cooperatives may be other efforts to find the support once provided by extended families, clans, guilds, and hometowns. As ominous as the onset of the internet and computer networking might seem to many of us, could not special-interest cybercommunities be a new form of social capital?

When it comes right down to it, Coleman's insight can be expanded. The Catholic church should be a veritable engine for producing social capital. Common worship and rituals enacted as sacraments of charity create and renew the bonds of the human family. Surely the grace flooding the world from the Holy Trinity is the original font of social capital, the wellspring of interpersonal trust. Make that Trust, with a capital T. □

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GENDER & RELIGION

Who's really running the show?

Kenneth L. Woodward

Annul me in my manhood, Lord, and
Make me woman-sexed and weak,
If by that total transformation
I might know Thee more.

The poet William Everson died in 1994 at the age of eighty-one, a wispy, Whitmanesque figure from the Beat Generation. Known as Brother Antoninus, Everson spent thirteen years as a member of the Dominican order where he published the poem whose opening lines I quote above. The poem was inspired by a passage from Teresa of Avila, in which the redoubtable doctor of the church reports that, in her judgment and that of a holy priest of her acquaintance, women are more receptive than men to divine initiative. Can this be right? Is male sexuality a barrier to whole-hearted surrender to God?

One finds in this poem, as in the entire body of Everson's work, echoes of the psalms, the Song of Songs, of Augustine's *Confessions*, among other cornerstone texts of the Christian tradition that yoke the erotic with the mystical. And in much of that tradition, it is male—not female—sexuality which is problematic for those who would open themselves to the divine embrace.

The issues surrounding the relationships between gender—both genders—and religion are complex, deep, and of long standing. These concerns were salient long before the advent of gender studies. One has only to consult such fine works of historical retrieval as Caroline Walker Bynum's *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (University of California, 1982) to see that the relationship of the masculine and the feminine in religion is such that stark polarities do not do justice to the facts. Isn't it possible, for instance, that in the realm of religious experience maleness is at least as problematic as femaleness? Moreover, I would argue that in the everyday life of most Americans today it is the female, not the male, presence that is most noticeable—and, in ways that feminist scholars choose not to notice—also the most powerful.

Nearly 90 percent of Americans claim at least nominal allegiance to Christianity. Most American Christians, of course, are Protestants. Too often, when Roman Catholics—including bishops—discuss issues like the ordination of women, they fail to look at the Protestant experience. I will focus mostly on that experience. Catholics, I think, can gain some perspective on their own experience by looking at Protestantism, and especially at what I call the feminization of American Christianity.

What I mean by "feminization" is not simple. Essentially, I want to call attention to those aspects of American religious life that privilege the feminine rather than the masculine. Most of these observations are sociological. But sociological change has deep psychological impact.

What I mean by the terms "masculine" and "feminine" will, I hope, become apparent as I go along. But to be clear I want to state at the outset that I do assume that there *are* differences between men and women, rooted in biology, and that, as a consequence of these differences, every culture makes distinctions between what is masculine and what is feminine, including the cultures of churches. The distinctions may be more or less arbitrary, but they are no less significant for being so. It is hard to imagine a culture that is not gender inflected. When Saint Paul wrote that "in Christ there is neither male nor female," he was not suggesting thereby that gender differences do not exist. Indeed, much of Christian tradition can be read as a continuing conversation about the

"To women who have everything."

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meaning of male and female as it relates to God, who is beyond gender.

Today, much of that conversation is confined to women and to "women's studies." Like its counterparts in other disciplines, feminist theology places gender at the center of inquiry, employing a hermeneutics of suspicion toward religious texts, and a strategy of retrieval to uncover the experiences and roles women really played in, say, the early Jesus movement. The goal is not female domination, but the liberation of men and women from androcentrism and its attendant evils. In short, the original sin was not pride but patriarchy, and from it has come all manner of evil: sexism, racism, clericalism, ageism, classism, conflict, leadership by hierarchy—even the rape of the environment.

Whatever the merits of this approach to theology and religion, what interests me is whether this hermeneutic of suspicion aligns with what I see of gender and gender relations among ordinary church folk.

For most Americans, religion is rooted in the local congregation. Particularly for the Protestant majority, the local congregation *is* the church. It is there that the word is heard, sacraments celebrated, connections made, marriages blessed, children baptized, loved ones buried. And if we look inside Protestant churches on Sunday, we find that most of the people in the pews are women. Although there are no hard-and-fast statistics, pastors I talk to say that women usually outnumber the men three-to-one. Congregations that are 80 percent women are not unusual, particularly an aging congregation, since women live longer than men. And that's just the weekend.

During the week, pastors live in women's world. Like the suburbs in a John Updike novel, the weekday world of American religion is a world without men. Women dominate the church committees, the prayer groups, the Bible study groups, the Sunday schools. You're much more likely to find a women's spirituality group than a men's spirituality group. "No one told me when I left the seminary," says William Willimon, a longtime Methodist minister, now dean of the chapel at Duke University, "that most of my time would be spent with women." From Monday to Friday, much of a Protestant pastor's time is spent in counseling. Many of the counselees are couples, but most are women. Indeed, in all the focus on pedophilia in the Catholic priesthood, attention has been diverted from the virtual explosion of sexual seductions involving male Protestant clergy.

The pastoral challenge facing most clergy is to find ways to draw men into active participation. Jews traditionally manage the problem by allowing only men to form a minyan. It used to be, of course, that in both Protestant and Catholic congregations certain roles were reserved for men. Only men could serve on the vestry, for example. Men were heavily recruited, though not always successfully, to teach adolescent boys in Sunday school. There were single-sex choirs. And among Lutherans there were the brotherhoods. But today exclusively male roles have virtually disappeared, while the sisterhoods, as at Jewish temples, are thriving. Among Catholics, the men were encouraged to make retreats with other men. But I myself have seen little movement among women to break up the brotherhood of ushers.

These are the homely facts of American religious life, far removed from robust themes of liberation and empowerment. But they well describe the environment of religion as it is experienced by the majority of Protestants. And that environment is perceived, at least by males, as essentially female. Which brings me to another level of observation: most of what goes on within church buildings is related to the nurturing of the young. And, fair or not, nurture is perceived as something feminine.

Synagogues, for instance, fairly bustle with women preparing the young for their bar or bat mitzvah. Sunday school is perhaps the major enterprise one finds under the roof of a Southern Baptist church. Those Catholic churches which most resemble the "community" that Catholics always talk about but seldom achieve are ones with parochial schools attached. Indeed, you don't have to be a sociologist to recognize the basic rhythm of American church membership. Americans are most likely to turn to church—usually after a long period of drift—when they become parents. Especially in the African-American community, which is the most "churched" community in the United States outside of Mormon Utah, adults use the church to help them in the rearing of their children. And it is through the children, I would argue, that churches reach most adults. That is, churches address adults essentially as parents.

In short, religion in American life is not only privatized; it is also domesticated, identified with the side of life away from work, from the civic and the public; away from the side which, rightly or wrongly, is identified with the masculine.

This is not a new phenomenon. As sociologist Rodney Stark demonstrates in *The Rise of Christianity* (Princeton University Press, 1996), early Christian communities were disproportionately female. In a pagan society that disparaged women, undervalued marriage, and regularly resorted to abortion and infanticide, Christianity extolled marriage and family life, protected and enfranchised women as members of the community, denounced abortion as murder, and readily encouraged their surplus of women to take (and domesticate) pagan husbands, who were notoriously inhospitable to both marital fidelity and family creation.

In American religion, women have always made up the bulk of Christian congregations. And churches, as cultural historian Ann Douglas has demonstrated, played the central role, from the middle of the nineteenth century on, in what she calls "the feminization of culture." In her book by that title (Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), Douglas examined how the liberal Protestant clergy, in league with women, sentimentalized American culture and transformed women into the exemplars of virtue. But there was little that was virile

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in the virtues upheld. Arguing from what she calls a "feminist" perspective, Douglas deplores the effects of all this on women, but she is curiously silent on its effect on lay men.

I was reminded of this prior "feminization" while doing an article for *Newsweek* on the rapid growth of the "Christian Men's Movement" among Evangelicals. I've long observed that Evangelicals are quick to recognize new markets and to exploit them. For example, the major reason why the liberal, mainline Protestant denominations are in deep decline is their failure to raise their own children in the faith. Evangelicals have noticed this, too, and for the last fifty years, through para-church agencies like Youth for Christ, the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, and a whole Vatican-full of similar organizations, Evangelicals have focused on recruiting, organizing, and catechizing the young outside of congregational structures. So it pays a journalist to watch where these Evangelicals put their time, money, and effort. And their latest enterprise is the Christian Men's Movement. It is, I believe, a genuine response to the alienation of men from the feminization of Evangelical church life.

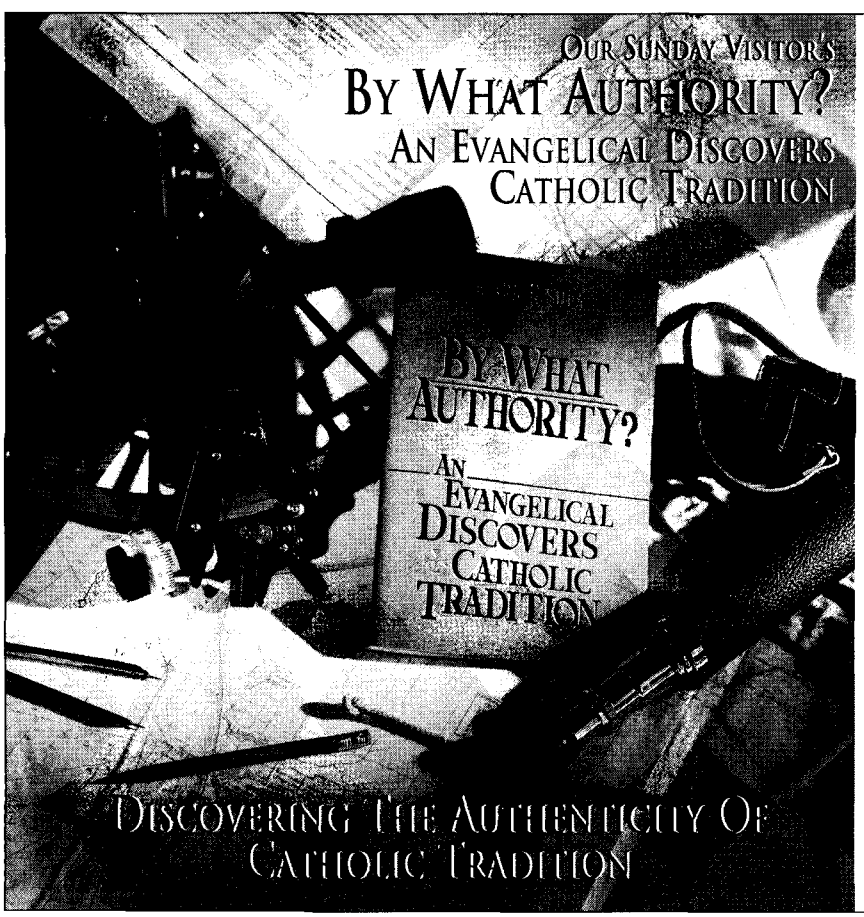
Keep in mind that Evangelical Protestants constitute the largest religious group in the United States—and the most committed. Remember, too, that most of them do not ordain women and take seriously the Pauline statements about male leadership in the church and in the home. I can only conclude that if these churches are having difficulty attracting men, then the feminization of American religion is by no means confined to those liberal mainline denominations that ordain women.

The first thing to notice about the Christian Men's Movement is its connection with sports. The movement's primary organization, Promise Keepers, was founded five years ago by Bill McCartney, a former Catholic who was the coach of the University of Colorado football team. The Promise Keepers meet in stadiums, where tens of thousands of men shout "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus" while doing the wave and chanting "we are the brotherhood, we are connected."

The second thing to notice is the promises they make: to be responsible to God, to their wives and children, to the church, and to each other, in that order. In other words, to be a man is to take charge, lead, protect. Leaders of the movement expect men to exhibit manly virtues and recognize these virtues as Christian. In short, these Evangelicals are responding in their own time and way to the feminization of religion that scholar Ann Douglas described.

The third feature is key. Jesus, the movement insists, is a man's man. He is the not androgynous Christ of sentimental Protestant iconography, but a mighty king and warrior, a leader of men and a willing Savior, a wild man with a redeeming purpose—and also the best buddy a guy could ever have.

Fourth, the movement is, in keeping with much of contemporary church life, highly therapeutic. Men are urged to confess their sins in small groups of strangers, to weep, emote,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and show their vulnerability. Clearly, Promise Keepers has been listening to contemporary pop psychology which holds an article of faith that what is wrong with men is that they do not show their emotions as easily as women do.

Finally, following the model of all twelve-step programs, these men are expected to find a male faith partner with whom they share their temptations and weaknesses. Further, they form small male-bonding groups in order to spread the men's movement in local churches. Already, 260,000 local congregations have tapped Promise Keepers as a way of encouraging greater male participation in congregational life.

As I read it, the message of the Christian Men's Movement is this: Following Jesus is not for women only, nor is it merely a spectator sport, which it tends to become for men in our domesticated, mostly female congregations. Consciously or unconsciously, the movement also validates an insight which sociologists confirm: The best predictor of whether a child will remain religious as an adult is not the religiosity of the mother—for children tend to take that for granted—but of the father, because he is not expected to be religious. That is, if the father demonstrates that religion is not foreign to what a man is and does, the child—especially the male child—is much more likely to be religious upon reaching adulthood.

Let me sum up: On the local level, women predominate, and what takes place inside churches is mainly though not exclusively focused on the nurturing of the young and the support of family life and relationships. Americans, when they get religion, get it primarily through the aegis of women: mom, most of all, but also the Sunday school teacher, who is usually a woman, or in the case of Catholic parochial schools, Sister Mary or her female lay alternative.

The pastor, usually a man, may exercise authority in the congregation, but to the young he is like the principal of the local elementary school: a remote authority figure. In religion, those who do the formation are in fact more significant than those who run the show. And the hand that rocks this cradle is, invariably, a woman's.

But, Ah, you might say: It is the pastor who has the authority and therefore wields the power, and since most pastors are male—all of them in the case of Roman Catholicism—that is what is important and unjust about American religion. Never mind, in other words, that the two acolytes, two readers, and four eucharistic ministers up there in the sanctuary at Saint Mary's Catholic Church are women. What's important is that the single male among them is the presiding priest.

I think the reality of congregational life is more complex than that. Let's look, for example, at the black church in America, which, in terms of numbers essentially means the black Baptist tradition. Here we see that the black pastor is a powerful figure, not only in the pulpit but in politics and in the wider African-American community. There are very few female clergy in the black church—about 5 percent—and most of those are in the Pentecostal tradition. If we look closer, through the eyes of a leading black scholar like C. Eric Lincoln of Duke Divinity School, we see that "the well-organized black church is an organization of subgroups in which women predominate and wield their own power. Women raise the money and, though men dominate the church boards of trustees, it is their wives who effectively determine how it is spent. Among black Baptists, power belongs to "the Mothers," a group of older women who have been in their congregations for decades and constitute the heart and soul of the church. On Sundays, the Mothers dress distinctively in white and preside from a special section of the church—opposite the 'Amen corner' where the male trustees sit." Says Lincoln: "The minister who has the Mothers on his side is virtually unassailable, and woe be it to the minister who doesn't."

Because of their power, and because of the importance of the Old Testament in black religion, the Mothers oppose women preachers. Another reason for this opposition is that so many black families lack fathers that the women want their children to see in the minister a disciplined father figure. In the inner-city, where most black churches are, the priority is wooing young males to the church. Scholars estimate that 60 percent of young African-American males have no contact with church—up from 20 percent just a generation ago.

Obviously, space does not permit analysis of gender and power in every American denomination. But I want to note in passing that within the United Methodist church, second only to the Southern Baptists in terms of numbers, women exercised enormous power long before ordination was open to them. The organization United Methodist Women is, arguably, the most powerful single group among the denomination's various boards and agencies. It raises and spends millions every year with no interference from the hierarchy. Indeed, it constitutes a female hierarchy within the church.

From this brief survey of congregational life, I think it not at all an exaggeration to say that the altar and the pulpit represent the last bastions of male presence within American Christianity. But that too, is changing rapidly. Indeed, within the liberal mainline Protestant denominations, we are witnessing the rapid feminization of the clergy. Let's look at the figures.

Although men still outnumber women three-to-one in the mainline clergy, seminary statistics suggest that the future belongs to women. Among Universalist-Unitarians more than half of the clergy are women. According to the 1994 figures from the Association of Theological Schools, 37 percent of all the students now studying for the Master of Divinity degree—the ordination track—are women. That's up from 10 percent in 1972. Meanwhile, the number of men studying for the M. Div. degree has risen by less than 5 percent over the same twenty-one-year period. And that does not include those studying for degrees in Christian education, in which women also predominate.

In the United Church of Christ, there are 535 male seminarians and 531 female. Among Presbyterians, United Methodists, and Episcopalians, men outnumber the women,

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but not by much. The Episcopalians, for example, have 248 women studying for the priesthood, and 323 men. Among the Disciples of Christ it is much the same: 237 women and 351 men.

If we consider only the prestigious, national, nondenominational divinity schools such as Harvard and Yale, women outnumber male students. And even though ordination is forbidden to women in the Catholic church, there are already more women than men working as professionals in the ministry of the Catholic church in the United States.

But statistics alone do not tell us very much. They do not tell us anything about the quality of today's seminarians, their attitudes toward ministry, or about the culture of divinity schools. Hence they do not tell us much about the feminization of the ministry.

A generation ago, the Protestant ministry rivaled the law and medicine as attractive options for young men. That is not the case today. A good indication of this change is that admission standards are lower than in the past. According to psychologist Joseph P. O'Neil, principal research scientist at the Educational Testing Service in Princeton, New Jersey, "Most theological schools are 'open admission' institutions that rarely reject anyone who is of sound mind and with a bachelor's degree." And not surprisingly, women entering seminaries are on average better educated than the men. They are also apt to be older and to have children. The average age of all seminarians has increased dramatically—at Yale Divinity, it is thirty-four—but that doesn't always mean they are more mature. Many are entering second careers, often after failing to find either success or fulfillment in their first choices. Many of the women, in particular, are divorced, quite a few are middle-aged, and many are single mothers.

Whatever else it is, religion is a symbol system and to change the symbols is to change the meaning that religion expresses. Surely there is need to incorporate, expand, and deepen what is feminine in religion. But there are limits.

Now I'm sure you've heard that despite all this women in the clergy still face a "glass ceiling," as Joan Brown Campbell, the general secretary of the National Council of Churches, recently put it. She blames sexism for the fact that too few women are accepted as head pastors, and almost none at prestige churches. But is sexism the only or even the major reason?

Unlike Catholics, Protestants prefer that their pastors not only be married but that they set an example of married fidelity and virtue. Although Protestants accept divorce for themselves, they'd rather not have it in their ministers. Divorce and single motherhood are major factors working against acceptance of women as pastors.

But the difference between male and female seminarians that I find most interesting is in their attitudes toward authority and its exercise. Here I want to draw on a very illuminating research paper by O'Neil. In it, he reviews several studies of seminaries and seminarians, both Protestant and Catholic, and combines these with his own research. One study compared students at a Protestant seminary in Chicago with students preparing for careers as doctors and nurses. The study found that early on the students in medicine adopted "a cloak of professionalism" while the seminary students did not. Seminarians were less interested in displaying the knowledge and skills of their own profession than in being "the right kind of person." And they did that by relying on their "gut feelings," that is, by displaying their personal rather than professional skills. In short, the study finds the ministry becoming an oxymoron, a "profession without authority," a profession bent on erasing the distance between clergy and laity. The pastor as buddy, the minister as mom, are the models.

O'Neil candidly speculates that this deprofessionalization of the clergy, as he calls it, is "the effect of the huge increase of women candidates on the culture of Protestant seminaries." Women, he argues, are much more likely than men to create community by sharing personal information. And he adds that, by the sheer weight of numbers, "[women] are socializing the male seminarians to do the same."

Rebecca Chopp, dean of the faculty at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, draws remarkably parallel conclusions in her *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995). Women, she observes, enter seminaries for different reasons than men. They "come to theological education out of deep changes in their lives and cultures," she asserts. "Women...come for the space and time it gives them, and to gain valuable resources for living their lives." In those denominations where women take an active role, Chopp goes on, they have helped reshape the church's image as a "community of local belonging, of friends." In sum, "women bring what they know to a situation and it becomes transformed. The transformation is already occurring in many mainline denominations." Indeed it is.

But running a parish or congregation is not the same as sustaining a family. Like it or not, congregations are also institutions that require the exercise of authority and demand that some distance be observed between those who stand in the pulpit and those who sit in the pews. So it is not at all surprising that O'Neil finds that women seminarians, far more often than men, opt to go into pastoral counseling and chaplaincies where small-group or face-to-face encounters make up a large portion of the work day. In sum, the glass ceiling may in fact be a glass door which women choose not to open because of the way in which they prefer to operate as clergy.

Not only is feminist theology widely taught in seminaries, but the informal curriculum is also frankly and ideo-

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logically feminist. Not surprisingly, Protestant seminaries are also home to large numbers of lesbians and gay men. Anyone acquainted with Episcopal seminaries, for example, can tell you which ones cater to lesbians and gays. Some seminaries have housing especially for homosexuals. Catholics who fear the celibate priesthood is attracting too high a proportion of gay men should look at what is happening—what in fact has been institutionalized—at interdenominational and mainline Protestant seminaries. None of this augurs well for the masculine presence in the ministry—if by masculine we also mean heterosexual.

My aim has been to keep an eye on what is going on. In this context, I was struck by a passage in Elizabeth Johnson's widely acclaimed *She Who Is* (Crossroad, 1991). I recognize that in her very interesting exercise in reconciling feminism with Catholic tradition, Johnson is pursuing a conservative, not liberal, much less a radical strategy, as feminists construe these terms. But I was struck by her negative references to the male images of God one finds in Christian art and churches: especially of Jesus as "the visible image of the invisible God" who "is used to tie the knot between maleness and divinity very tightly."

I stopped and asked myself: What male imagery? In those Protestant churches that accept the iconic, one typically encounters—especially in Methodist churches—a very androgynous if not altogether feminized Jesus. The Good Shepherd and the Good Samaritan predominate with Jesus looking for all the world as if he were a permanent-wave advertisement.

But Johnson is a Catholic and I assume it is Catholic churches she has in mind. Yet what we find in Catholic churches is usually a suffering Jesus on the cross, though without the barely covered phallus that we find in Renaissance paintings. And when you look again at Catholic iconography, what do you see? Everywhere and always you will see a Madonna. Surely Johnson cannot be objecting to that. When Joseph shows up, he is usually depicted as an old, sexless man. And what of the much maligned God the Father? He gets no pictorial representation at all. One has to travel far, to the Uffizi Museum in Florence, to the Cathedral in Prague, or to the Franciscan church in Cracow, to find the most prominent Western images of the Father. And it is the same image: of an old man holding up the hands of a crucified Christ with a dove flying above the crown of thorns.

Now what is remarkable about this ancient image of the Father is that he reminds us not of a man, but by his posture of receiving the Christ on his lap, he is in the spitting image of that far more prevalent figure, the Pietà.

No, what seems to bother feminist theologians is the masculine language and verbal icons used in reference to God. These, they say, exclude, deny, and oppress women. Do they really? Do they really reinforce a male-dominated society and church? Are symbols nothing more than reflections of a social structure that privileges the men at the expense of women?

To turn one final time to Caroline Walker Bynum, this time as editor of a book of essays, *Gender and Religion* (Beacon Press, 1986). There we read that religious symbols are inherently polysemic: that is, they have "the capacity to refer to many levels of human experience" and also "the capacity to bring users of symbols to appropriate that to which the symbols point." She cites her own work as an example of what she means: she points out that to Christians in medieval Europe, "God was sometimes seen as a bridegroom to whom all souls, no matter what sort of sexual body they inhabited, related as a bride." That is what William Everson was struggling with.

What Bynum also finds is this: that women's symbols and myths tend to build from social and biological experiences; men's symbols and myths tend to invert them. Women's mode of using symbols seems given to the muting of opposition, while men's mode is characterized by emphasis on opposition, contradiction, and conversion.

Much the same point has been made by Walter Ong, surely one of the great Catholic intellects of our time. In his penetrating book *Fighting for Life* (Cornell University Press, 1981), Ong considers masculine and feminine as human contraries, finding in the former a need for agonistic experience, opposition, and "ritual contest" that shapes maleness from "its biological base to its human heights." To the psyche, Ong remarks, the church is always and overwhelmingly feminine—Holy Mother the Church. In that overwhelming feminine environment, he believes, the all-male clergy function as a countervailing force.

It may be that Ong's reflections apply only to Catholics, or perhaps only to those Christian traditions whose high sacramentalism involves deep structures of the masculine and the feminine. And it is from the dialectical relationship of masculine and feminine, he argues, that the church receives much of its dynamism and energy.

I have spent time on the Protestant experience because I want to indicate not only what is happening among our Christian brethren but also to suggest that the loosening of this dynamic tension may be one reason why mainline denominations are in such dire straits.

The church as a profession is not like the law, medicine, or finance. Women who enter these professions do not change them; they are changed by the professions, and if they do not perform well they are out.

But religion is different. Whatever else it is, religion is a symbol system and to change the symbols is to change the meaning that religion expresses. Surely there is need to incorporate, expand, and deepen what is feminine in religion. But there are limits. And as we can see in the exponents of post-Christian feminism, those limits have already been breached. My concern is not with theory or theology but with the atmosphere of ordinary American churches as I find them. And what I find in them is the gradual disappearance of anything that might adequately be described as masculine, no matter who in the hierarchy is calling the shots. □

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HOMOSEXUALITY & THE PRIESTHOOD

Vocations off the straight & narrow

John Shekleton

I went with my friend Samuel to see the movie *Priest* last year. We were drawn by two of the themes: the life of a priest, and how gay men living within the church deal with their sexuality. Seeing *Priest* drew me again toward an experience I had set aside many years ago. It made me think about the paths Samuel and I had taken, about the fact that we were both gay and called to the priesthood, about why many gay boys like us grow up to be priests.

I am a forty-three-year-old gay man who began adulthood as a Jesuit. My life as a Jesuit was a time full of friendships, of intense learning and exotic travel, of troubling feelings of inadequacy and loneliness offset by moments of illumination and great joy. It was a life busy with activities that touched and changed the lives of others and, through them, myself. But it was not the path that I could remain on for the rest of my life.

Ten years after entering the Jesuits, I left. I left because I wanted to become an independent, sexual being. At the time I used many other words to explain leaving. I said that I wanted to be in charge of my own destiny, to choose by myself where to live and with whom to live, that I had no vocation. But every reason was rooted in my desire to participate in the great dance of life as a dancer, not as a chaperone. I wanted to be an open member of the gay community. I wanted a lover.

Now I often find myself wondering about it all. And after seeing *Priest* I returned to one question I had not thought about for a long time: Why do so many gay boys grow up to be priests? I cannot offer the results of a sociological or psychological study, but I can offer my experiences, experiences that may resonate with those of others, in whole or in part.

These days when someone gets to know me, they need to know about my two closets: one lavender, one black. Most people at work know that I am gay. I have helped form a gay employee group and do work with a gay-sponsored charity. And I know for sure that my gay orientation is an agenda item on the rumor mill.

Not as many people know that I was once a Jesuit. That discovery, however, generates a reaction akin to my coming out. It, too, is a public declaration of having lived on the edge, of having communed with a veiled and compelling force. Surprisingly, many of my contemporaries find it easier to understand that I am gay than that I once led a life in religion; they can more easily comprehend that someone is gay than that he ever vowed (and kept) celibacy. Being gay is still being a searcher for love and intimacy, but being celibate and bound by a vow of obedience, living in a community of individuals not of your own choosing—that is like being a Vulcan, a creature of another species.

When people learn that I was a Jesuit, I can see flash past their eyes two central questions: Did I enter the Jesuits to deny my gayness? And, was there something special about me that I should become a priest?

The answer to the first question is easy. Yes, I was in denial. The answer to the second question requires more reflection.

It doesn't strike me as odd that I was not the only gay boy wanting to grow up to be a priest, but it rankles me to see my vocation reduced to a mere search for refuge from a hostile society. My experience tells me that there was something else involved. I know my desire for priesthood had a lot to do with repression and misdirection, but it also had to do with discovery and bravery and growth, perhaps even grace. There are many ways to talk about the path of discovery, but in this essay I will focus on the somewhat idiosyncratic interplay of three concepts: color, movement, and mystery.

John Shekleton *lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.*

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Color. I don't want to overstate this, but I think it is interesting how the use of color often helps define who we are. Color can be a kind of tool that gives palpable expression to and helps shape our interior identity. It is quite common to find a favorite color, to dress in it, paint our walls or houses with it, literally surround ourselves with it. We find colors we think complement us: "I look good in blue," we think. Color is one of the many artifacts used, aptly or not, to help us create a sense of self.

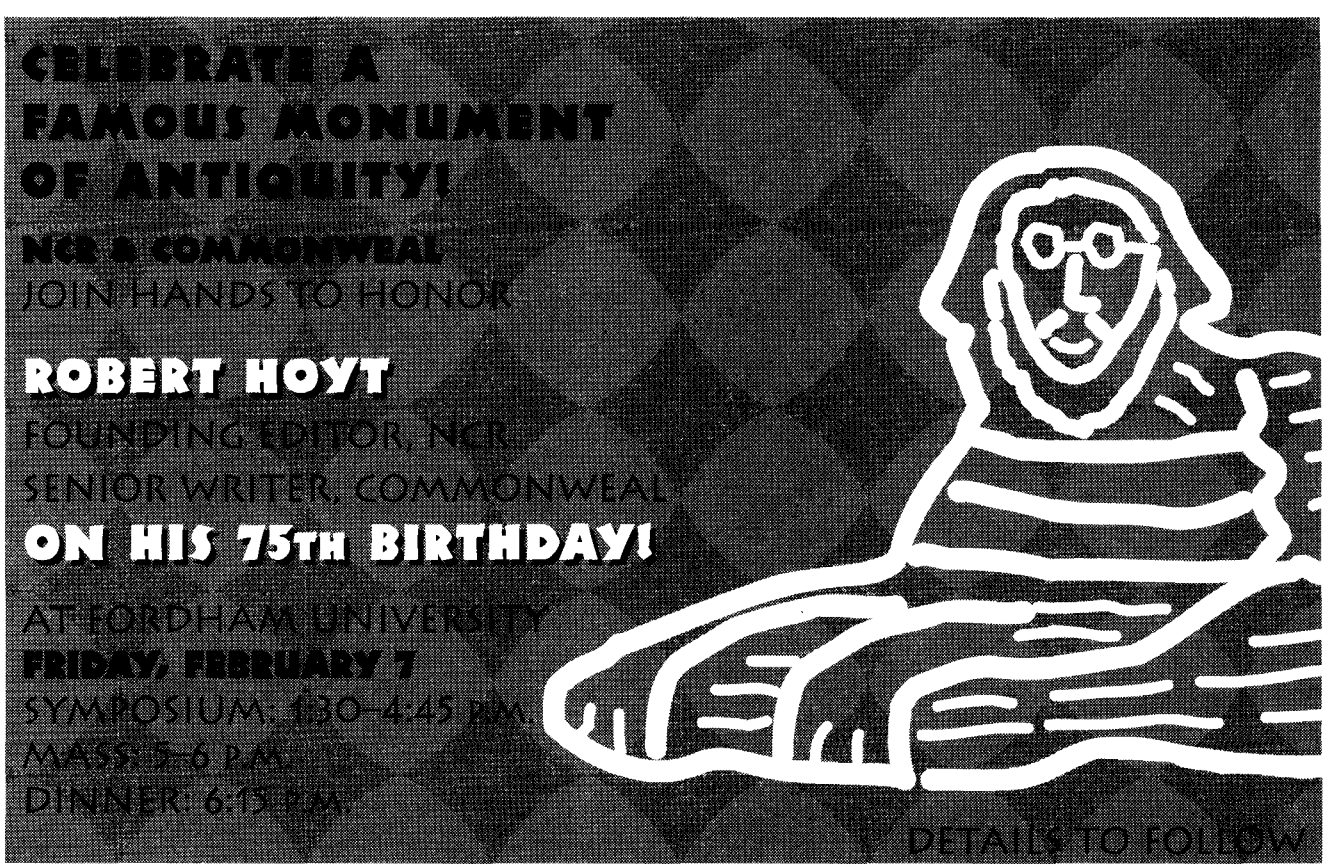
Personally, choosing what I would wear each day was one of the pleasures of my childhood. My mother never forced anything on me; she gave me the freedom to wear whatever I wanted. I had learned from her how colors complemented each other. Sometimes, I confess, just thinking about some piece of fabric made me happy. My youth was an era of cowboy fanaticism, and I loved to put on a red shirt with coral snap buttons. It was a Western shirt, something a cowboy might wear when he went into town. The buttons were beautiful to look at and to touch, their color changing slightly in the light. And the red of the cloth made them stand out all the more. I was always proud to wear that shirt.

Thinking about colors became a daily ritual for me. Before I went to bed, I studied my wardrobe, matching shirt and pants and socks. Each selection had its own emotional signature. Having created the right wardrobe was as gratifying to me as climbing a tree was to my brother. There was something calming about it. Indeed, this exercise helped me to fall asleep.

Every painter delights in creating mood and structure by juxtaposing colors of many hues and brightnesses within a composition. An appreciation of color is a key element of a painter's natural talent as well as a skill to study and acquire. Perhaps for me the choice of wardrobe allowed a similar sense of achievement, providing a way to bring harmony into one aspect of my life.

We all easily recognize that colors have significance; there are colors which are appropriate for various organizations, military and religious, for example. Black is for mourning in our culture. Red is a color of lust—or martyrdom. Color communicates, and is one of the tools that people employ for both fitting into society and for defining themselves. For all of us, finding (or redefining) our place in society is a central challenge in our lives.

For gay children, finding that place can be a frightening journey. Role models are few. In a Catholic culture, stating you have a vocation is like draping yourself in the perfect color. A vocation to the priesthood both brings immediate respect for you as an individual and sets you into a recognizable and respected role. And it is a career open to everyone (at least every male); no unique talent is required beyond a desire to do good. For an outsider—for gay children—stating you have a vocation is a way to turn the tables on soci-



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ety. As a young boy I could not visualize myself in any other career than the priesthood. Other professions were full of pitfalls and hazards I could not negotiate. I knew I was more interested in dolls than sports, more comfortable playing with girls than boys, more enchanted by music and dance than by collecting baseball cards or torturing frogs. I carried with me a suspicion of society. How could I fit into the masculine world as I experienced it? Having a priestly vocation set all that fear aside. Indeed, for a young boy fascinated with colors, a church that honored and understood the aesthetic and theatrical power of color seemed a perfect place to work. Declaring a vocation brought me into harmony with my future life, just as my choosing of wardrobes as a young child had prepared me for each new day. Needless to say, color can also be an essential component of disguise.

Movement. Mass was the ballet of my youth. I was an altar boy, serving nearly every day. Perhaps I served so often because of my punctuality, or my willingness, or my surety with the Latin, or because I usually was paired with my brother. For whatever reason, I was often at the altar. The ritual, however, began before we walked out into the sanctuary. First we vested in the great clean colors of white and black, ample cloth folding over our light child bodies, a white surplice hanging over a long flowing black cassock. While the priests kissed their garments before putting them on, our vesting was less formalized. Still, vesting was a special kind of movement. It was different from every other change of clothes. When you put on a cassock, you draped your whole body with this single action. In the newer cassocks, one had to reach down and pull up the hems of both sides in order to zip up the long zipper sealing you in. And as the cassock fell back down to your ankles, a young boy knew that he had stepped into another world, a slightly feminine world, a world where your walking and turning were the peaceful glide of a sacred corpus, a world where your body was less visible but where your movement was more noticeable.

Next, one slipped on the surplice, pulling it over like a sweater. It was never the smoothest of actions, more a struggle with some odd, combative creature. Once it was on, I would move to the full-length mirror to straighten everything out. It was then that I noticed the neatly ironed folds, saw the contrast of white over black, two strong colors that made each other stand out. On a boy with the right shape, the surplice sat on square shoulders and formed an architectural covering over the soft, conical cassock.

Within these sacred robes, an altar boy's body became a stage prop. Even a young, shapeless youth could feel in his flesh that his movement was grand and dramatic. The bows, the genuflections, the well-timed turns, the subservient presentation and movement of holy objects during the liturgy, all of these were part of a great sacred drama. They were something to see. And to the altar boy, they were something to feel.

Surely the fancy dancing two-stepper, the men walking into a restaurant with good cheer and fine looks, and the well-toned youth comfortably strolling the beach, experience the same sensations: the seduction of the right look and the right movement. The body can be a delight to the eye, not just the hands. It is part of a dance, an ancient and honorable choreography.

Movement is an expression of what is going on inside. It can speak of reverence or indifference, rhythm or cloddishness, an awareness of space or obliviousness to it. And movement speaks sex. It always speaks sex because a body is always a sexed thing. By cloaking a sexed object one can tone down the immediacy of hormonal impulse, or redirect its energy into another form. But you cannot eradicate that essential attribute.

As a gay boy I knew that sex and body were at the heart of my identity. I had known for years that I could still be a man and be a priest, but as a priest I would be a man whose body performed a more stylized movement, never the twisting, sinuous, and unpredictable movement of sex with another. I did not think that priesthood sought to annihilate sex; it only emphasized other parts of sex—the visual parts, the flirtatious parts, the chivalrous parts, and the moral responsibility that the great lusty act of creation engendered. In my imagination, the priest participated in a romantic movement, the mysterious love for the Other. Yet it was a movement in which he never settled down into one solid, firm relationship. He was more a leaf taken up in a great wind than an oak that remained rooted in one spot only to spin off seedlings. He could be desirable and even loved, yet he could never be touched by another human being. Still, he would not be alone. If he could not father a family, he could lead a community. And he could do that proudly as a man.

Mystery. I remember especially a devotion of my childhood, the veneration of the Virgin, the sorrowful mother. I remember it occurring at the end of another greater devotion, the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. In the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the consecrated host was displayed in the monstrance, prayers were said, songs were sung, there was much incense, the priest wore an impressive cope, a gold cape that hung over his shoulders. I remember that if you entered the church after the Blessed Sacrament had been exposed, you had to kneel before entering your pew. This was not a genuflection. You had to get down on both knees and bow your head, as if you were a peasant entering the presence of a monarch. After all, deity was revealed.

After the host was replaced in the tabernacle, the priest would process over to the Marian altar. Then the music changed; it became plaintive, and we spoke the words of children, distressed children in search of peace.

"Hail holy queen, enthroned above...our mother...All loving, all holy...we beseech thee, poor banished children of Eve...mourning and weeping in this vale of tears...to thee do we cry...."

Ritual has power. Mystery has power. Their allure is all

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the greater in the mind and imagination of a young child. There is an energy force around ritual, and each particular ritual act contains that energy and directs it. I knew that the power of what took place in the sanctuary was not like the power of armies or presidents or corporations or even principals and teachers. I knew it was a power that sometimes took a long time to gather into an active force. But when it had gathered, it could not be stopped. The God of Israel had tried many times to edge the Egyptians into freeing the Israelites. But when he had had enough, he acted with awesome might.

But God's power did not have to be obvious, did not have to be like ordinary power. God's power was cloaked, often acted out by people he had chosen. When Pope Leo I spoke with Attila outside the walls of Rome, it was God who persuaded the great marauder to spare the city. God didn't have to crush the Hun or his horde. God changed his heart—or at least his mind. Enough of that kind of change, and the world would be a different place, a world with room for people like me.

A gay child knows, even if he cannot articulate it, that his struggle is in the heart and in the mind. It is a struggle that starts with an awareness of difference, often an awareness that is accompanied by feelings of isolation and loneliness. That awareness of difference kept me thinking and wondering, speculating about why I was different. It took me thirty years to articulate the reason.

As a boy I was drawn to issues of the heart and of the mind. I have struggled with these for many years, and I know the terrain. It is not at all surprising to me that I, and many others like me, gravitated to a career that would allow us to bring harmony and understanding into the hearts and minds of others, as well as ourselves.

When I left the Jesuits, a good friend called my attention to a passage from Saint Augustine's *Confessions*: "*Aliud est de silvestre cacumine videre patriam pacis, et aliud est tenere viam illuc ducentem.*" I would translate: "It is one thing to look at the land of peace from atop a wooded knoll, and another to take up the road leading there."

Sometimes we take many steps wandering in circles atop the knoll, waiting to set out on our journey. When we do set out, it is often our bodies that force us to do so. Anxiety attacks, or strokes, or changes in weight, or sexual desire, or an overwhelming sadness, or the entry of a loved one can push us off the knoll. Such discomfort or physical expectation can propel us out of our leisured walk and onto the path toward peace—a more harrowing route.

For me, and perhaps others, priesthood promised to be that land of peace. But for many of us, priesthood turned out to be merely the knoll, and real peace could only be achieved by pushing on toward a fuller understanding of our sexual identity. True, many priests who are gay speak of honesty, integrity, openness, courage, self-respect, acceptance, and love within the priesthood. But for some of us, peace never came until we extended our search along a different path, and that meant leaving our roles in the church. Yet we needed to climb the mountain first, to go high enough so we could see. And in the deep silence and trembling power of insight, we finally opened our eyes and hearts and bodies and set forth on a different road.

Introibo ad altare Dei, ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meam. □

William Hart

Splitting Wood

When the wood is soft
and seasoned, it opens
with a ripping noise
as the grain is cleaved.
Two log halves
fall backward in the dirt.
The heartwood glows
bright in the sun.

But when the wood
is hard or green
or soaked with rain
it can, as the ax
comes flashing down
clam like an iron maiden
to repel the blade
with a dull THONK.
A thunderbolt
of unspent energy
travels the ax handle
buzzing the chopper's hands
testing every tendon.

The obstinate log lies
now on its side, dented
unsplit, more pissed
off than ever, the secrets
of its seasons as a tree
locked tight in the chambers
of its dark resentful
heart.

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Richard Alleva

HEROES & PRODIGIES

'Collins' & 'Shine'

In *Michael Collins*, Irish revolutionaries fight the British forces everywhere: on the streets, inside public buildings, at police stations, in the very domiciles of the enemy. But behind the camera all of the filmmakers seem to have been absorbed by the most imperialistic power of all—big-scale Hollywood moviemaking. Watching *Michael Collins* made me feel that logistics were in the saddle and riding the director, Neil Jordan. The result is never boring but never truly exciting. It lacks a guiding, idiosyncratic consciousness. It is a hollow movie.

Collins was the revolutionary who, after the destruction of the older insurrectionists in the wake of the 1916 uprising, led the terroristic campaign that forced the British to the bargaining table in 1921–22. But, since Collins was one of the negotiators who settled for Ireland's division and the continuance of the oath of allegiance to the crown, he found himself at odds with President Eamon De Valera and many others who wanted a united, independent Irish republic rather than home rule within the British Empire. The former swashbuckling guerrilla now became, for the sake of peace, a beleaguered member of the new establishment and was finally assassinated by some branch of the I.R.A. Obviously, this *is* a spectacle of crowds, bombardment, oratory, murder, and ignorant armies clashing by day and night.

And at first the director seems to know how to handle his budget. The Easter uprising is presented with proper economy, for where would this movie go if its opening scene was also its most spectacular? Also swift and sure is the depiction of the I.R.A.'s first attacks, with each short action sequence subtly accelerating the tempo of the previous one.

Yet, before *Michael Collins* is one hour old, we sense that it may or may not get faster, may or may not get noisier, but most certainly won't get any deeper. Two factors are at work here:

First, the current approach to movie spectacle goes something like this: Now that we've spent all this money on extras, historic reconstruction, and firepower, let's show the public as clearly as possible what we bought. Result: predictable long shots of fleeing crowds and exploding buildings, along with equally predictable cut-ins to anguished faces, corpses, etc. But the real masters of spectacle, from D.W. Griffith to David Lean, were artistically ruthless with their raw materials. Not content to display massive sets and crowds, they evoked excitement by selection and emphasis. We may or may not recall the Babylonian infantry being slaughtered by the Persian invaders in *Intolerance*, but we never forget the way the dying Mountain Girl is suddenly transformed by a cinematographic trick into a mosaic commemorating her sacrifice. The last charge of Lawrence of Arabia's army is impressive in David Lean's epic, but even better is the close-up of a canteen banging against a saddle bow as the charge accelerates. Touches like these are mostly missing from the spectacle of *Michael Collins*, and without them the burning buildings remain burning sets, the dying victims remain dutiful extras.

Second, it's clear that Jordan wanted his movie to be a thinking-person's epic with characterizations at least as memorable as the spectacle. But the writing of intimate scenes is as banal as the staging of the street battles. For instance, the love triangle of Collins, his best friend Harry Boland, and Kitty Kierna, is as

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conventional as the Clark Gable-Spencer Tracy-Myrna Loy vehicles of the 1930s. Kitty is finally relegated to being a sounding board for Collins instead of a character in her own right. (Who ever thought that Julia Roberts would end up playing Horatio?)

And, despite Liam Neeson's reliable magnetism and virility, the characterization of the hero is superficial. Collins was an unpredictable compound of intellect and force, personal tenderness and political expedience. For us to be truly fascinated by him, we would have to be exposed to the murkier corners of his nature. But in this movie Collins is just a roaring boy, leaping from battle into oratory and back again, taking time off only for the most conventional of love trysts. In one uncharacteristically quiet moment, he tells a friend that politics have released a violence in him that he now fears was always too much a part of his nature. This is a true revelation and could partially explain why Collins was so willing to compromise at the bargaining table. But the insight is only slipped in, and rather late in the movie at that, and is never made part of the movie's true substance.

However, the last half-hour of *Collins* begins to grip because Jordan takes a risk in his depiction of the De Valera-Collins relationship, daring to suggest that the future president set up his comrade by sending Collins to negotiate with the British. Because he "wanted someone else to bring back the bad news" while he himself would fight on for a completely independent republic, De Valera may have set the machinery in motion that led to his comrade's death. I don't know how historically defensible this view is but, dramatically, it is the best thing in the movie. Collins and De Valera become an archetypal pair of antagonists: the lion vs. the fox, the bluff warrior vs. the Machiavellian statesman, the Big Fella vs. the Long Fella. And Alan Rickman makes a great, foxy De Valera: secretive and sly, dainty and infinitely dangerous.

I respect Neil Jordan's desire to portray some of his country's anguished history. But sometimes the best way to serve your native land is to explore your own obsessions, for your demons may be your country's demons. *Michael Collins* is big and bold and public and noisy, but Jordan's earlier film, *The Crying Game*, in its fantastic melodrama and sexual perversity, conveyed a lot more of the pain of Ireland.

The art world has its heroes and martyrs, too. David Helfgott, the pianist-hero of *Shine*, isn't well known in this country, but in his native Australia he's apparently something of a phenomenon. A success as a child prodigy in the 1950s, he suffered a mental breakdown that derailed his career and turned him into the sort of person Oliver Sacks writes about: a manic babbler whose logical skips and leaps, wisecracks, speed-freak stutterings, and surreal wordplays compose a weirdly poetic discourse. After more than a decade of nonperformance, David inched his way back into music; loving and marrying the attractive, supportive Gillian gave him the strength for an acclaimed comeback.

The crux of the movie is the relationship between David and his father, Peter, a Polish Jew so spiritually harrowed and crimped by the Holocaust that he turned his home into a fortress. Though fostering his son's gift, Peter wanted only a local success for the boy since international renown would break up the family enclave. When the younger Helfgott rebelled, Peter pronounced him dead, and David's subsequent mental collapse after a triumphant concert may have been an unconscious submission to his father's wrath. After David's comeback, the old man acknowledged his son's accomplishment, then prepared himself for death. There could be only one strong male Helfgott.

What a turbid, Oedipally fraught scenario, yet how easily, how slickly the movie goes down the viewer's mental gullet! The subject matter is skimmed, never probed. Scriptwriter Jan Sardi and director Scott Hicks deliver all the inevitable moments in the most predictable ways: firelight reflected in old Helfgott's eyeglasses manifests his torment. Peter's banishment of his son is carried out by burning the scrapbook filled with David's press clippings. Pianistic ecstasy is supposed to be conveyed by the camera swooping about our hero as he whips up a Rachmaninoff storm. David's Royal College instructor warns him that "the piano is a monster! You've got to tame it!" Then, when his pupil breaks one of his instrument's strings during practice: "Ah, now we're getting somewhere!" (The equivalent of the young pug pulverizing the bag in a boxing movie.) And the onset of David's illness is shown by the youth thudding to the floor as if Mental Breakdown were a bruiser who tags his victims with solid rights to the jaw. Such visual and verbal clichés render this inherently powerful story silly or, at least soap opera-ish.

Yet *Shine* isn't dismissible, for its actors fill out their roles with the conviction this movie needs. As the adult David, the Australian stage star Geoffrey Rush, a James Woods etherealized, captures the blend of sweetness and torment in the pianist's nature. Noah Taylor has an even harder task in playing the adolescent David, since he must suggest that same sweetness and torment behind a listless exterior. (Helfgott's breakdown actually made him more communicative.) Taylor proves a master-minimalist.

The supporting cast is fine, with standout performances of Helfgott's two teachers. As an Australian instructor, Nicholas Bell conveys that special quality of a big fish in a small pond who wants his students to escape from the pond. David's grand old Royal College teacher is Sir John Gielgud, who is grand and old and royal and, one desperately hopes, immortal.

But Armin Mueller-Stahl, as the father, dominates this film as indefatigably as Peter dominates his family. This German actor gets everything: the survivor's guilt, the compulsive love that must consume, the raging of a plebeian Lear.

Shine may not live up to its title, but its cast gives off more than a few glints. □

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Frank McConnell

EXPECTING VISITORS?

Aliens from inner space

At this point it's difficult to read the movie listings, or channel-surf in prime time, without coming across an invasion from outer space; and it's going to get even more difficult as we surf toward the emblematic year, 2001.

Of course, bad guy/good guy alien stories have fascinated us throughout the century of millennium's end. Science fiction, the unique literary voice of our century, would scarcely be imaginable without them. Still, as we approach millennium's beginning, the fascination is approaching the obsessive-compulsive level.

The most significant event of summer 1996 was not either political convention, not Dick Morris, not the Atlanta Olympics, not even the prospect of O.J. revisited: it was *Independence Day*, a medium-budget, high-tech, bad-space-guys-come-to-kick-earth's-butt-but-we-kick-*their*-butt epic that, with cheesier effects, would have fit right into the 1950s. And yet it generated lines around the block, and it is one of the few movies ever to have been a cover story on both *Time* and *Newsweek*—*before* its premiere.

Mere hype? Sure. But don't underestimate hype as an index of the national psyche. The trick of advertising is not to tell folks what they should like, but to tell them it's okay to like what they already do like.

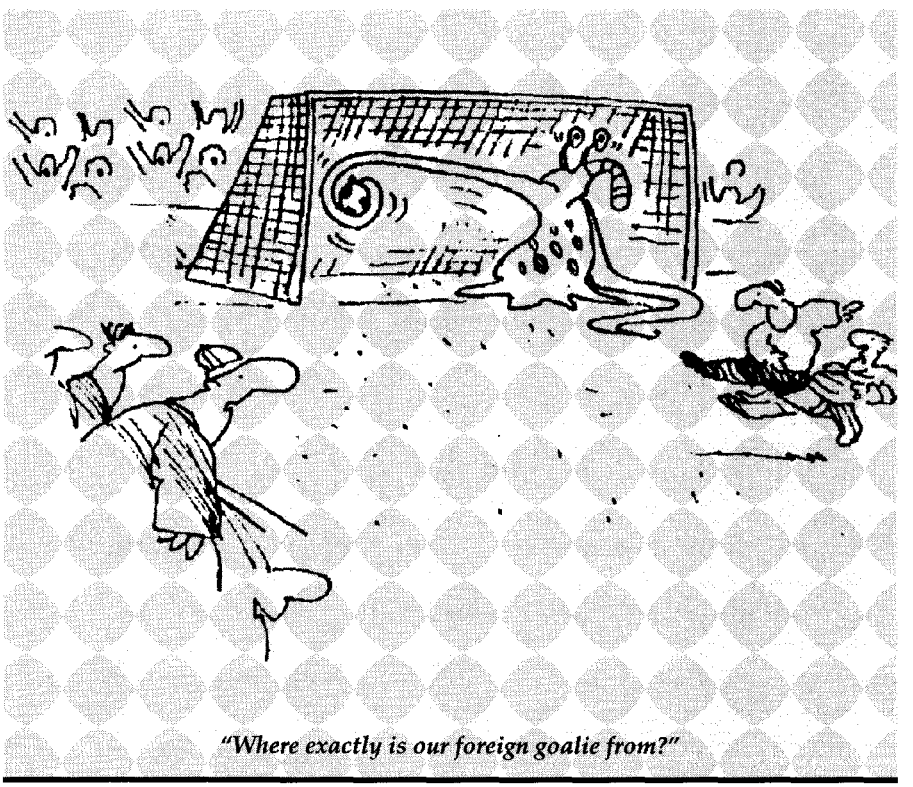
And *Independence Day* is only the tip of the iceberg—or, better, the leading edge of the saucer. Hollywood has already scheduled a baker's dozen and more of invader films—including the much awaited *Mars Attacks*, by the wonderfully eccentric Tim Burton (*Edward Scissorhands*). On TV for the last three seasons the most interesting, classy show has been Fox's "The X-Files," whose ongoing premise is that aliens have landed, are here, and the government is covering it up: something, by the way, that a scary number of folks really believe. Fox and the three other major networks have all written into this fall's schedule a slew of new series centering around the alien-invader theme—including one with the eloquently economical title, "Dark Skies" (ABC). The fact is that, even if actual saucers never actually land here, we have been invaded by aliens—not from outer, but from inner space, from the abandoned—we thought—mineshafts of the imagination. Look around: they're here.

But just who are they? A little history will help.

The first invasion of Earth from another planet occurred in 1898, in H. G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds*. I hope someone will organize a suitable centennial celebration, since this is the sort of literary event that does not often happen: *no one* before Wells had thought to envision an advanced, unsympathetic, murderous force showing earthlings their pathetic littleness. Science fiction had begun—as had twentieth-century *Angst*, which, of course, is the tonic chord of science fiction altogether.

1898: two years before 1900, which is almost as apocalyptic a number as 2000, and when international tensions and military buildups throughout Europe had virtually ensured that the First World War would, sooner or later, break out. Wells's novel spoke to just that sense of dread of the future century: in fact, his invading Martians *were* the future century or, even more plainly, the future.

And no sci-fi invader story has ever, really, trespassed the boundaries of Wells's original invention—which does not mean that there haven't been brilliant, unexpected variations on the theme. The aliens are always the future—yours and mine. They can be purely malevolent, as in *War of the Worlds*; they can be semidivine and kindly, as in Stephen Spielberg's *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*; and they can



"Where exactly is our foreign goalie from?"

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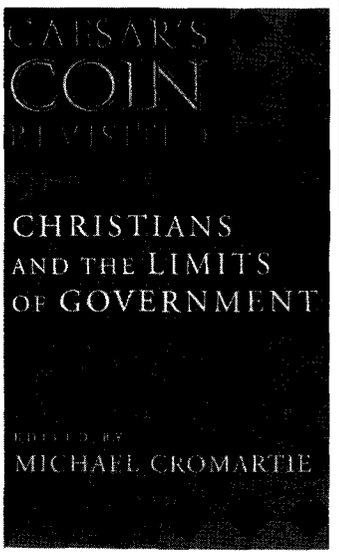

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be a puzzling mirror of our own moral complexity, as in "The X-Files" or the brilliant, recently resurrected series from the eighties, "Alien Nation" (get the pun?). But they are always a projection of what we feel ourselves to be *now*, of where we think we're headed *now*. Science fiction is not, to use the dismissive academic phrase, "escape literature." It's more like no-escape, no-way-out literature. It's about the "future" only in the sense that your life is about the future when you climb out of bed in the morning. Or, as someone once observed, sci-fi is always "about" the precise year in which it was written.

In fact, you could write a revealing spiritual history of Anglo-American aspirations and expectations just by tracking the various ways the aliens, since 1898, have appeared.

Do they come to damn us or save us? Are they commies or missionaries? Or are they just—as in, say *E.T.*—feel-good imaginary friends, straight from the New Age nonthink tanks of Marin County? Whatever they are, at various times, all these things—they are always mirrors, barometers of our hope. They're also, of course, as is all sci-fi, deeply religious manifestations. As we approach millennium—an artificial, Eurocentric date certainly, but just as certainly inescapable—our quantum physicists grow more mystical, our philosophers and theologians become more obsessed with the ancient, this-world-is-merely-illusion wisdom of the Gnostics, and prophets and madmen of every stripe plan for the End of Reality as We Know It. And the rest of us watch more and more movies and TV shows about alien visitors.

Around the approach of the year 1000, people began looking for angels and demons in the sky—they were familiar with Revelation, after all, and knew what was what. Nothing happened, of course, except the psychic longing of that end-time produced the High Middle Ages, Saint Francis of Assisi, Dante, and ultimately—us.

And now we await 2000, and boy, are we atwitter. Not many of us use Revelation as a template for experience anymore, but we do have Roswell, Area 51 in New Mexico, and the concept of faster-than-light travel for metaphors, and the angels and demons are back in our minds again. Surely some revelation is at hand. Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

Well, probably not. But our passion for Visitors from Beyond makes noble sense as our still-unquenched thirst for the transcendent. Mankind can no more live without gods than you can kill yourself by holding your breath. And our collective enthusiasm for stories—myths—about those visitors, the rough beast slouching or flying toward a new birth, is no more nor less than an expression of our longing for meaning. Evil or benign, these mythic figures tell us the Gnostic truth that—quoting the slogan of *Close Encounters*—"We are not alone." □

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Who sees what, & possibly why

Visionaries
The Spanish Republic and the Reign of Christ
William A. Christian, Jr.
University of California Press, $39.95, 566 pp.

John T. McGreevy

In late June, 1931, two young children in the Basque region of northern Spain claimed to see the Virgin Mary. Hundreds of seers soon echoed their claim, and by the end of the year over a million of the curious, the devout, and the skeptical had made their way to the small township of Ezkioga, making it the most prominent Marian apparition site after Lourdes and Fatima, and until Medjugorje, in our own time.

William Christian's investigation of this phenomenon is the culmination of an effort that has already resulted in important books on shrines in a rural Spanish valley, apparitions in the late medieval period, and moving crucifixes in the early twentieth century. Christian's relationship to Spanish religious history is beginning to approximate that of Herman Melville to whaling novels.

This point really must be reemphasized in the context of *Visionaries*. The footnotes suggest that Christian has lived in Spain for much of the past three decades, and a short review cannot do justice to the persistence with which he has tracked not only the seers but those who promoted their cause, along with the family members and friends who continued (in the face of clerical and state repression) to honor the visions in subsequent decades. Trudging from convent to farm attic to apartment, Christian has unearthed a series of first-person accounts and spectacular photographs; together with the hundreds of interviews he has conducted, they allow a stunning recreation of a now distant world. Perhaps no historian has ever recreated a specific Catholic milieu in such depth, with such meticulous attention to detail.

Christian's perspective on this wealth of material is anthropological. A more historical narrative might have emphasized the occurrence of the visions in the tense years before the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Criticisms made by the visionaries of the democratic, "godless" Spanish Republic, for example, can be understood as one of the religious divides that historians now see as central to European history between the French Revolution and the Second World War.

Recent discussion of Lourdes (just over the Pyrenees from Ezkioga) has followed these lines, emphasizing how the shrine's promoters, and French Catholics more generally, saw themselves in opposition to the secular, even anticlerical culture becoming dominant among the intelligentsia and in the cities. David Blackbourn's brilliant *Marpingen* (1994) stresses the hostility of Bismarck and Prussian liberals to the backwardness of a Catholic culture that could accept claims of a Marian apparition made by children in a small German town.

Christian acknowledges this context, noting the controversy over the removal of crucifixes from classrooms in Spain concurrent with the Ezkioga visions, violent clashes between Catholic rightists and an anticlerical Left, and tension between a Basque-speaking, rural population and Spanish-speaking, urban authorities.

But most of Christian's energy centers on religious experience, on Ezkioga as a "window on how new religious worlds came to be." An older Catholic historiography, when it ashamedly glanced at such phenomena at all, centered inquiry around the question "Is it true?" Christian asks "What was it like?"

The consequences of this strategy are frequently exhilarating. In a series of vignettes, Christian deciphers why some visionaries chose to lie down on a wooden deck on Good Friday, 1932, acting as if they, like Christ, had suffered crucifixion. Or why young women, often

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criticized by clerics for immodest dress, became the most trusted of the seers. Or how word of the apparitions spurred not only pilgrimages, but parallel, almost wholly unpublicized, visions in distant parts of Spain.

The insight demonstrated in these compressed pieces of analysis, however, is often diminished by Christian's reluctance to focus on representative figures and his penchant for interrupting chronological descriptions of the visions with thematic excursions. Reading *Visionaries*, despite Christian's clear prose, is hard work. Roughly seven hundred individuals, according to the index, make at least cameo appearances, meaning the reader becomes acquainted with the equivalent of a Basque village.

More significantly, Christian's own evaluation of what the visions meant—for Spanish history, for the visionaries, for Catholicism—is circumspect. (The concluding chapter is titled "Questions without Answers.") This reluctance to end with a series of pronouncements perhaps stems from a healthy skepticism about historical certitude, as well as a realization that the friendships gained and confidences shared in many years of research are not easily evaluated.

In part, though, this ambiguity results from a veneration of "experience." The figures Christian treats least sympathetically are those bishops and Jesuits who eventually deem the visionaries frauds, and certainly little sympathy should be shown to the clerics who frightened the devout into silence about some of the most powerful events in their lives. But the task of separating the authentic from the fake, if carried out in a more humane manner, is presumably part of a leader's responsibility in an institution convinced that boundaries between our world and the supernatural are not impermeable. This judgmental cast runs against the grain of Christian's temperament, and certainly *Visionaries* is eloquent testimony to the conviction that a "failed" apparition can illuminate a particular time and place. And, too, Christian effectively makes the point that the process of selection and rejection is constantly occurring well in advance of ecclesiastical umpires, as crowds find particular seers and messages more or less persuasive and useful.

Even so, historians do occasionally act like bishops and Jesuits. More assessment, more examination of motive, might have given *Visionaries* a sharper analytical bite. But of course only Christian's remarkable achievement makes such an investigation now possible. □

John T. McGreevy *is the author of* Parish Boundaries *(University of Chicago) and teaches history at Harvard.*

A CHRIST-HAUNTED LAND

Judgment and Grace in Dixie
Southern Faiths from Faulkner to Elvis
Charles Reagan Wilson, photographs by Tom Rankin and Susan B. Lee
University of Georgia, $29.95, 302 pp.

Jason Berry

Southern folkways draw deeply from the wellsprings of religious imagination. The region is overwhelmingly Protestant and permeated by evangelical beliefs in experience-as-destiny, of life as a search for conversion, and of redemption from depravity and sin. Ironically (or perhaps providentially), it was a Catholic novelist, Flannery O'Connor, who made the memorable observation that the South is "Christ-haunted."

Judgment and Grace in Dixie, by Charles Reagan Wilson, a historian at the University of Mississippi in Oxford, is a brilliant excavation of religious strains in the Southern psyche. Wilson was coeditor, with William Ferris, of the much-praised 1,600-page *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. The Center for the Study of Southern Culture, where Wilson teaches, has brought prestige to a campus that has come light years since the 1962 race riot that left two men dead. The center's projects include a blues archive to which B.B. King donated thousands of recordings; a film-video catalogue that markets a range of documentaries on religion, politics, culture, and folk life; and annual conferences on William Faulkner and Elvis Presley.

Wilson's core theme is the emergence of a "civil religion" after the 1920s, a time when the collective memory of defeat in the Civil War still held a heightened sense of myth. Historian George Tindall's notion of "myths as mental pictures summing up a people's experiences" is Wilson's touchstone. The Lost Cause myth made secular saints of Robert E. Lee and other Confederate leaders.

Even now, a generation after the civil rights movement collided with that myth (and largely toppled it), the Rebel flag is the militant symbol of a past that, in Faulkner's words, "is never really past." In a 1984 campaign swing through the South, Ronald Reagan regaled crowds with the demagogic line, "The South will rise again." Just last winter, Patrick Buchanan, in a cynical pitch to whites, argued that "Dixie" was a song with a meaning just as valid to one group as the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" for another. David Duke preached a similar brand of relativism in the 1991 Louisiana governor's race.

The Lost Cause, writes Wilson, folded into a theological idea that "Southerners were a Chosen People, but they were also a Tragic People." To many northern intellectuals, the idea drips with sentimentality. But the Agrarian School of the 1920s, which formed at Vanderbilt and was led by Alan Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and John Crowe Ransom, extolled an ethos of land and family as a

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bulwark against industrialization. The religious sensibility was deep; the vision was blurred, however, by a failure to recognize the violent racial domination behind the Lost Cause myth. Warren eventually reversed himself and in the 1960s became a critic of segregation.

By then, the civil rights movement was advancing a counter-myth. The impassioned oratory of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., identified Southern blacks with the children of Israel, searching for a promised land of freedom. King stirred the African-American spiritual imagination, and it surged alongside the white evangelical current. "The myth of a biracial South finally recognizes that the Southern tragedy is symbolic of the human condition," writes Wilson. "Southern white narcissism—and American pride—must be repudiated, says this myth, in favor of the awareness of its common lot with the rest of humanity."

A new white myth came from sports. "The god of Southern football is a tribal god, a god of the Chosen people," notes Wilson. He's serious. When Jefferson Davies died in New Orleans in 1889, a four-and-a-half-mile procession followed the funeral cortege. Tens of thousands followed King's horse-drawn hearse through the streets of Atlanta in 1968. A few years later large crowds turned out for the funeral of Elvis Presley in Memphis. But the most massive funeral came in Birmingham, a half a million people for the Alabama football coach, Bear Bryant.

Elvis's fusion of rockabilly, white gospel, and rhythm-and-blues galvanized teen-agers with the body language of Southern bluesmen. Elvis embodied a biracial myth; yet the homeboy who said "yes, sir" to reporters when he returned from the army was still a sexual outlaw to social critics of early rock 'n' roll.

Byrant, by contrast, made winning "the ultimate morality." His spectacular coaching record straddled the transition from segregated to biracial football teams. In the end, he was a Southern man for all seasons—and human to a fault. "He cursed and yelled and was generally gruff," writes Wilson. He had smoked too much, drunk too much, and liked to party.... This fit Southern expectations perfectly. A people raised on hard religion based on sin and guilt knew that everyone falls short in the glory of God. Byrant's very vices evoked images of the Southern past. For a people mired through much of their history in miserable poverty, the only way out indeed seemed to be to fight and claw and scrape and escape it. The Southern Protestant religion leaves room for the possibility of redemption, and the worse the sin the better the feelings of salvation.

The photographs by Tom Rankin and Susan B. Lee interspersed through the text capture the grace and timelessness of small churches, baptisms in rural ponds, and art works of unlettered folk. □

Jason Berry *is the author of* Lead Us Not into Temptation *(Doubleday).*

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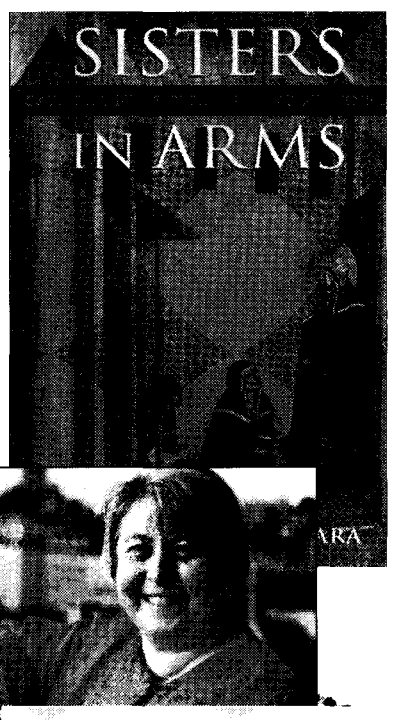

SISTERS IN ARMS
Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia
JO ANN KAY McNAMARA

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A HOUSE BUILT ON SANDEL

Democracy's Discontent
Michael J. Sandel
Harvard, $24.95, 417 pp.

R. Bruce Douglass

It has been a quarter of a century since John Rawls, the Harvard philosopher, published *A Theory of Justice*, which is widely viewed as the most important work of political philosophy to be written in English in our time. It certainly has been the most widely discussed. Of all the commentary it has spawned, none has been more important than the critique offered by Michael Sandel of Harvard's government department in a book published in 1982 called *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, which succeeded in calling into question some of Rawls's most fundamental premises, and in the process posed a challenge he has been struggling to meet ever since—unsuccessfully, in my judgment.

Sandel took exception in particular to Rawls's claim that political liberalism did not depend on any partisan assumptions about the human good, insisting that this contention would not withstand critical scrutiny. It was necessary, he said, for us to be "persons of a certain kind, related to our circumstances in a certain way," for Rawls's theory to work. The controversial assumptions Rawls had made about human beings and their welfare—especially the claim that every good we seek is a matter of choice—would have to be defended on their merits and Sandel left a clear impression that he doubted that could be done adequately.

Rawls has been trying ever since to prove Sandel wrong. But the more he has had to say about the subject, the more obvious it has become that Sandel was indeed right, and that the resulting critique goes to the heart of what is problematic about contemporary liberalism. For try as he will, Rawls cannot get away from a way of thinking about the human good that is indeed partisan—and anything but uncontroversial. In his most recent book, *Political Liberalism* (Columbia University Press), for example, he suggests that the presumption should be against reference to religious beliefs in public discourse. And it does not help at all to suggest, as Rawls has done with regularity when pressed to defend this view, that all he is trying to do is give expression to an emerging "consensus" in the constitutional democracies of the West about the basis of our public life.

The questions this raises are very much at issue in Sandel's new book. Even though it is much more historical and less philosophical, *Democracy's Discontent* is very much a sequel to *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*. It provides a clear rejoinder to those who think that liberalism now deserves to be regarded as "the" political philosophy of the West. For even in this country, whose political life has been so deeply influenced by liberal ideas, it is just not true, Sandel reminds us, that liberalism has really been hegemonic in the manner so much recent liberal writing suggests.

Or, more precisely, it has not been so *until very recently*. In Sandel's narrative, which spans the whole history of the republic, liberal ideas have long been one current among others. Only in the last fifty years has this changed. Sandel regards liberalism's recent ascendancy as a real setback—and the source of some of the most serious problems besetting us as a nation.

Sandel is a republican thinker in the classic sense, which means that he is just as much concerned with (civic) virtue as he is with liberty. Like Thomas Jefferson, he understands the fate of the two to be intertwined. Liberty, understood as the effective control of one's destiny, is something that can only be realized through the exercise of self-government. It cannot be divorced, therefore, from a willingness to shoulder the responsibilities of civic life. People need to be prepared to conduct themselves as citizens if they are going to enjoy the fruits of liberty securely, and that means society must encourage the cultivation of certain virtues, such as self-sacrifice and a concern for the common good.

For much of our history the connection between virtue and self-government was taken for granted. Not only did democracy entail a strong commitment to self-government in localities, but it also involved a presumption that people there have a right—and even a responsibility—to create and maintain a way of life reflective of their values. That presumption was honored in the law in everything from Sabbath observance to the functioning of the public schools. Moreover, it was recognized that more was at stake in managing the economy than just securing prosperity and the distribution of its rewards. Notable figures throughout our history—such as Jefferson, again—understood the way economic conditions affect the rest of life, and insisted that economic policy be made with other concerns in mind. For better than a century (1780s-1890s), policies designed to protect the economic bases of a way of life thought conducive to self-government (such as the family farm, for example) were able to survive.

To our great loss, such concerns now seem sentimental and archaic. The federal judiciary has overruled one local practice after another in the name of protecting individual rights (school prayer, restrictions on hate speech, prohibition of the sale of contraceptives, etc.). Ever since the New Deal, those responsible for managing the economy have been doing much the same thing by adopting Keynesian-inspired measures to promote economic growth and consumption while neglecting virtually any other relevant concern. We are left, as a result, with weak communities that have little capacity to govern themselves and a citizenry that, for all the various liberations it has embraced, is frustrated by a growing sense of powerlessness.

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The irony of this outcome is inescapable—which is why Sandel considers the influence of what he calls "procedural liberalism" in our public life as a problem to be overcome, not a source of needed remedies. Contemporary liberalism's retreat from moral deliberation about the good life is a distortion of what the American political tradition is all about. The only way we are going to avoid further cultural and political fragmentation is to strive to recover something of the republican heritage we have lost.

But how? Here is where Sandel's argument loses much of its force. It is a point where he is attentive to practical matters, and he shows in the last chapter that he has given much thought to identifying the forces in American life today that might function as agents of the kind of change he has in mind. But ironically it is not clear that he has given anywhere near enough reflection to the issues of principle his argument raises.

Sandel is obviously aware of the standard objections to the kind of participatory politics he favors, but does not begin to take them seriously enough. It must be admitted, for example, that the reason the federal judiciary has taken it upon itself to invalidate so many local practices—such as racial segregation—is that it found them morally objectionable. And if one is at all sympathetic to their intentions in doing this, the obvious question is whether it would really be preferable to revert to a situation where localities were free to do whatever they chose on such matters—which is not answered merely by acknowledging that republican politics is "risky business."

After all the debate generated by the rise of "communitarian" critiques of contemporary liberalism, it is very late in the day to be advancing an argument which raises issues of this sort without being prepared to argue their merits, and Sandel's unwillingness to do so constitutes a real failing, in my judgment. Even more disappointing is his failure to take up in any very direct way a question which is arguably even more critical to the success of his project. It is natural, I think, to wonder whether the republican ideal is a part of our heritage that has been overrun by the course of events. Maybe it is obsolete? There are moments when Sandel himself comes close to admitting as much, and the fact that he never really comes up with any good reasons for thinking otherwise makes it easy to dismiss the whole argument as an exercise in nostalgia.

That impression is only reinforced by the failure of the book to discuss in any very direct fashion the question of why as a matter of principle it would be better for us to live in the manner Sandel has in mind. For what that does, of course, is lend even more credence to the widely held suspicion that those who have been attacking contemporary liberalism along the lines Sandel has been doing have no viable alternative to put in its place. Because I find so much of his critique to be both persuasive and illuminating, I would like to believe otherwise. But this book, I am afraid, gives little basis for doing so. □

R. Bruce Douglass *is dean of the faculty at Georgetown College.*

Soul of the World

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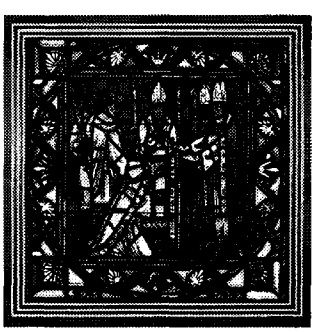

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RELIGION BOOKNOTES

Lawrence S. Cunningham

It is difficult to keep up with the books published on the experience of women in the Christian tradition. Inevitably, some of this material (especially in the more popular categories) owes its publication more to enthusiasm than to competency. Furlong's anthology is, alas, an almost textbook example of this problem. Gathered here are snippets of writings from eight medieval women and one group of women (the Beguines).

Visions and Longings: Medieval Women Mystics
edited by Monica Furlong
Shambhala, $20, 248 pp.

A short introduction accompanies each selection and Furlong begins the book with a longer, but not very convincing essay. The title tells us that the subject is mysticism, but one selection is not from a mystic (Heloise), and the text given from another (Clare of Assisi) is not a mystical text but a religious rule. The introductory essay is a farrago of clichés and generalizations. Especially irritating is the carelessness with which Furlong corrects, in asides, scholars like Caroline Walker Bynum or lumps visionary and mystical literature together in a facile fashion. The book has no index and no bibliography.

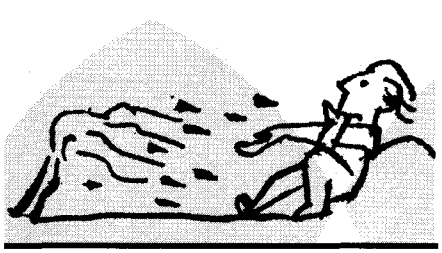
Most of the original texts in this anthology are already available in reliable and inexpensive editions. I mention this book only because there are a number of such unsatisfactory paste-up jobs around. Furlong, a British author, has a certain popular reputation as a writer, so to my mind this rather slapdash work is exemplary of an unfortunate trend.

McNamara's work, by contrast, is a learned and readable history of religious women which begins historically with female discipleship in the New Testament era and ends with some contemporary reflections on female religious orders today. The author, a historian at Hunter College in New York City, has not only participated in a working group of scholars interested in this topic but has published widely on women religious in Christian history. She is particularly good at differentiating "models" of female sanctity in their historical context, reminding us that women functioned with greater or lesser autonomy at various times and in various places. McNamara has benefited from and participated in the work of serious church historians who are sensitive to gender issues.

Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia
by Jo Ann Kay McNamara
Harvard University Press, $35, 768 pp.

Without being reductionistic, McNamara uses the lens of gender difference to study ways in which those taking up the ascetic life were motivated by the desire to erase gender differences, or find a way for men and women to live in relatively genderless community, or even to create a kind of "third gender." Such attempts to achieve gender parity were prompted by the hegemony that men held over the sacramental life, the "dangers" of celibate friendship, and the power relations inevitable in the rise of the bureaucratic church.

The chapter headings of this fine work describe the ideal female Christian types that one might find at a given period in the church's life. McNamara divides her material into large historical periods: the Roman Empire, the Early Middle Ages, the High Middle Ages, the Early Modern, and the present era. The precise merit of this highly accessible historical study rests in the author's keen appreciation that the Christian tradition, though organic, is not monodirectional. No straight line of development leads from the desert ascetics to the "active" orders of the modern period. McNamara raises many historical questions that remain pertinent for today. For example, women's early monastic communities needed priests only for the confection of the Eucharist and sacramental penance, while most of their liturgical life remained within their own competency. Is that not the case today? Spiritual direction is increasingly in the hands of women. Such a development is yet another example of at least one model of Christian community which is almost completely women-centered. This, of course, raises other theological questions. If a monastic community can be called an *ecclesia* (as it was all through the Middle Ages), is a woman's monastic community an *ecclesia* and, if so, in what precise sense? If not, what is this community, theologically speaking?



The only quarrel I have with this capacious work is that McNamara does not discuss the early Syriac ascetic tradition (about which there are now abundant resources in English), which made its own contribution to the ascetic life for both men and women. I also noted that in a few places the author had some theological infelicities: to describe mysticism as a manner of "perceiving and organizing knowledge about the forces that control the world" seems reductionistic. To call the theological principle of post-Tridentine Catholicism "salvation through works" is just flat wrong. Nor did Saint Teresa characterize "mystical theology" as the reception of the inner truths of Catholic doctrine (*sic*) through meditation. However, these small inexactitudes do not detract from the strong historical narrative and the rich panorama of persons that give shape and power to *Sisters in Arms*. I know of no other book of such comprehensive scope. It deserves a wide readership for what it tells us about women in the Christian tradition generally and in the ascetic/religious/vowed world in particular.

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Abundant notes, an excellent bibliographical section keyed to the chapters, and a well-crafted index are also included. I suspect McNamara will be closely read in religious communities of women.

Every now and again our philosophy department will have a speaker who will read a paper on the subject of mysticism and its putative truth claims. My impression has been that many of these philosophical discussions float in an ethereal and abstract world free from the anchorhold of actual texts, historical discrimination, and theological context. That impression of mine has also struck Grace Jantzen, philosopher of religion. Jantzen makes a sustained argument that one must not only understand Christian mysticism in terms of historical context but, and this is the burden of her work, a serious investigation of gender will greatly change how one views mystical experience.

Power, Gender, and Christian Mysticism
by Grace Jantzen
Cambridge University Press, $64.95, 384 pp.

Jantzen's real targets, set out vigorously in her first chapter and taken up toward the end of her book, are the heirs of William James's understanding of mysticism as an intense subjective experience that is primarily ineffable. By contrast, Jantzen follows the lead of social theorists like Luckmann/Berger and Foucault, seeing mysticism as the "social construction of reality." "What counts as mysticism will reflect (and also help to constitute) the institutions of power in which it occurs," Jantzen writes. Next to those words, in the margin, I wrote: "only?" Well, maybe not. Still, one thing Jantzen does not tolerate is any analysis of mysticism focusing on the private and subjective.

Jantzen is an autodidact when it comes to history. The large middle section of her work is deeply historical in its attempt to show that the mystical experience of women is gender specific and frequently suspect. Direct experience of the divine grants power, and when women were involved, a patriarchal, misogynistic, and power-greedy institution sometimes resorted to suppression. To each of these assertions one can adduce many compelling proofs, but to allow this perspective to be the exclusive lens through which to read the tradition brings its own distortions.

Jantzen presents these historical chapters as a "counter tradition" to show the weakness of the analyses of many philosophers of religion. Bernard McGinn's still unfinished history of mysticism (the first two volumes were reviewed in these notes) has, in my estimation, avoided the impasse of the philosophers thanks to both his theory of what counts for a "mystical" text and to his ability to read mystical texts without being reductionistic. Even the "bad" Bernard McGinn (as he calls himself when he is criticized for not providing enough social context of the sort Jantzen uses) does possess the conspicuous merits of reading texts carefully, making useful distinctions, and not indulging in sweeping generalizations.

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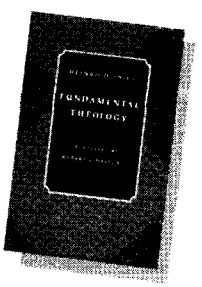

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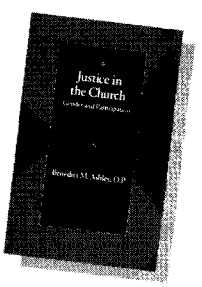

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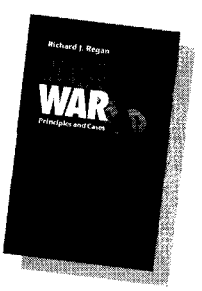

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Jantzen, more ideologically driven, is not always so careful. I cite only one example: Jantzen notes, rightly, that the "mystical" sense of Scripture lies hidden under the literal sense of Scripture. This understanding goes all the way back to Origen. The mystical sense was similarly employed with regard to the Eucharist and later the church itself to illuminate what was hidden in the bread/wine of the altar or behind the façade of the church as institution. Jantzen argues that the act/practice of reading in the service of mysticism was largely a male enterprise, because males constituted the literate class. But the plain fact of the matter is that contemplative *lectio* had very little to do with advanced literacy and very much to do with the memorization and rumination on texts. Anyone who could memorize a psalm or a *Pater* would engage in *lectio*. The mystical reading of texts for someone like Origen was emphatically not a matter of exegesis nor was it connected with initiation into mystery cults (an assertion Jantzen makes more than once) or the like. It was something that anyone could do, as the example of the early desert ascetics and contemporary Orthodox practice of the "Jesus Prayer" make plain.

Jantzen's historical chapters call out frequently for correction. Furthermore, while I agree that male and female religious/mystical experiences were quite different (a banality when one thinks about it), they are not so widely riven as she would have us think. Happily, her final two chapters on ineffability and the future of mysticism are far more restrained, better argued, and quite illuminating. Indeed, I applaud her sensible analysis of how most philosophers of religion get it wrong when they think of mysticism's purported ineffability as subjective experience rather than the experience of the ineffability of God. When seen clearly, one understands that mystical language is an attempt to describe the loving encounter with the Divine. John of the Cross's poetry (saturated in the language of the Song of Songs) was not about his experience but about what (or better, Whom) he had experienced.

In the final analysis, Jantsen is deeply ambivalent about how one defines mysticism in any fundamental sense. This skepticism derives from her dissatisfaction with philosophers who attempt to offer such definitions and her tendency to concentrate on first-person accounts of experience. Bernard McGinn, it seems to me, has avoided both of these problems, and has, from a theological point of view, broken the impasse. Jantzen, it strikes me, is entangled in old quarrels even though her vocabulary is contemporary.

In Search of Mary:
The Woman and the Symbol
by Sally Cunneen
Ballantine Books, $12.95, 416 pp.

Sally Cunneen's book has been issued as a softcover trade book, which is fine because more people will be able to afford it. Cunneen studies the Mariological tradition from the New Testament to the contemporary period from within the Roman Catholic perspective but with an ecumenical eye. She also has some wonderful final chapters discussing the place of Mary in contemporary literature and in women's experience. While inclined to the hermeneutics of trust, she is vividly aware of the feminist critique of much traditional Mariology. Following the lead of a number of scholars, Cunneen turns traditional understandings into new insights derived from her commitment both to the role of Mary in the Catholic tradition and to her critical sense of how that role can be abused. She notes, for example, that when speaking of Mary as Virgin one can emphasize, in that title, the autonomy of Mary rather than needlessly obsessing about sexual continence. Likewise, she has borrowed from those who read the Magnificat through a liberationist lens and, with the help of Alice Laffey, underscores the prophetic antecedents of Mary in the Hebrew Scriptures. Nor does Cunneen have much patience with those who herald the "humility" of Mary in a groveling sort of manner; she quite rightly attempts to recover a deeper, less pejorative sense of what humility actually means.

Cunneen has cast her net wide. Part of her book was written while she was in France, giving her the opportunity to contemplate a lot of art and visit many classic Marian shrines. She has also queried a number of contemporary persons to seek their insights into the role of Mary in their spiritual and artistic lives. The result is a book that is less tendentious than Marina Warner's overpraised *Alone of All Her Sex*. Though less comprehensive than the older two-volume work on Mary by Hilda Graef, Cunneen's effort is more *au courant*.

Despite a few errors of fact (Tertullian was never a bishop; Jill Raitt is not a Protestant; etc.), this is a fine book made all the more appetizing by its graceful prose, full bibliography, and index. It could simply be read for its own profit or used as a resource for adult education or academic classes. *In Search of Mary* is a much-needed work that examines the role of our Lady in the Christian tradition, free from the distressingly flamboyant effusions that one so often encounters. Filled with deep faith, learning lightly worn, and a sympathetic but critical eye, *In Search of Mary* is a treat. □

Lawrence S. Cunningham *teaches theology and is chair of the department at the University of Notre Dame.*

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TAKE A HIKE

Nancy G. Westerfield

Mine is a lifelong marriage. After forty-six celebrations of an August 1950 wedding date, I anticipate that only death will interrupt our pleasant union. The dread of death is that it will interrupt our walking.

For forty-six years, late in the twentieth century, we have lived carless lives, never owning, never driving an automobile. And so: the 100 pairs of shoes that I estimate I have walked my way through.

We married fresh from graduate school, he with a Ph.D., I with a master's degree. Ours would be academic careers, in a variety of small and larger communities across the United States, through lean and fat years of professional employment. Though considered oddities and mavericks—"Dr. and Mrs. Walker," we were dubbed on one campus—we never met with discrimination or pressure to conform.

Actually, in the summer of 1950, he had bought a car and was learning to drive. (I had no such skill.) He sold it so that we could afford to marry. It bought the train tickets that carried us off from Cincinnati to Oklahoma and his first faculty appointment. Our honeymoon was that trip in a Pullman compartment. We arrived with $78 between us.

From Oklahoma we moved to Texas, to Mississippi, on to Arkansas—always by train: a succession of temporary positions replacing professor-reservists called back to Korean War duty. By this time, we knew that there would be no children, a simplification of our wanderings. Finally, we located in states farther north with longer tenures: Iowa, Ohio, and Nebraska, where at last we stayed.

Northern winters have been a fact of life ever since. Forty years of weather have gone by, step by step, underfoot, yet weather never kept us from job commitments. More than once, I was the only librarian to open the college library for students. Cars couldn't start. Feet do.

As a homemaker, household management called for some plain and fancy footwork. Only one town ever had public transportation. I walked, and I carried, carefully scheduling my portages. Once I slipped with groceries, breaking half a carton of eggs over my head: the comic walker. Once he ended in shock, after a shoulder-slalom down an icy driveway: the tragic walker.

Always, by force of circumstances, we lived close to the job. We rented. We never built or bought in suburbia. Living in the "college slum" blessed us with a special affinity toward students, a "Pop and Mom" relationship.

The routine of our daily lives included for relaxation a walk (what else?), every afternoon or evening. Marriage Encounter, every day. Problems talked over, problems solved, hopes and expectations shared. Plans for the next trip abroad—eight of them, six by ship—made possible by sheer carlessness. Plans for retirement years, which we chose to spend in our town of 25,000 on the plains of Nebraska.

Retirement presented fresh opportunities for willing feet. We entered lay ministry, initiating from our Episcopal church three services read weekly, at two nursing homes and in the hospital chapel. We add another in the summer: Sunday-morning worship for travelers at a Holiday Inn. Sturdy volunteer teams have gathered around these initiatives. I still post the Saturday welcome signs at the inn, then set out at 7:15 A.M. on Sunday itself: both five-mile round-trips.

At the end of the second millennium, a man and a woman chose to bond in a nineteenth-century style of life. Did so choosing (we have never even owned a television, though I have no quarrel with electricity) equate with a lifelong marriage? Certainly, the nineteenth was a century of more stable commitments, as well as a century for thrift and self-sufficiency, "virtues" we have practiced. Too, the old-fashioned academic community that we entered midcentury was familial, with maternal oversight of newcomers in its midst. Howsoever, our marriage thrived, and though our lives have never lacked for momentum, walking has been for us a way to keep a marriage going. In robust health of body and spirit, we are girt and shod and street-smart for the rest of the journey. □

"It's the last twenty-six miles that are the worst."

Nancy G. Westerfield *is a poet who lives in Kearney, Nebraska.*

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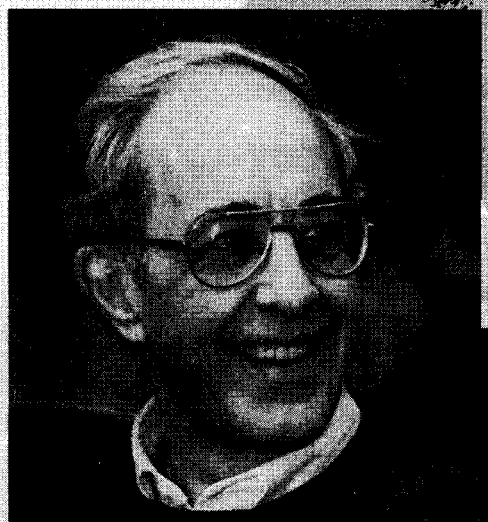

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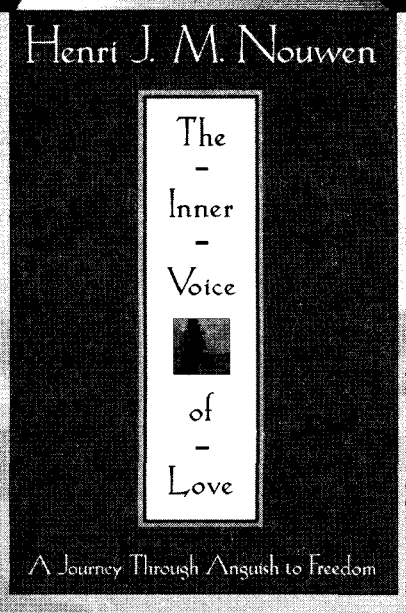

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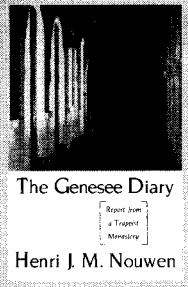

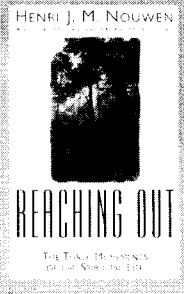

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